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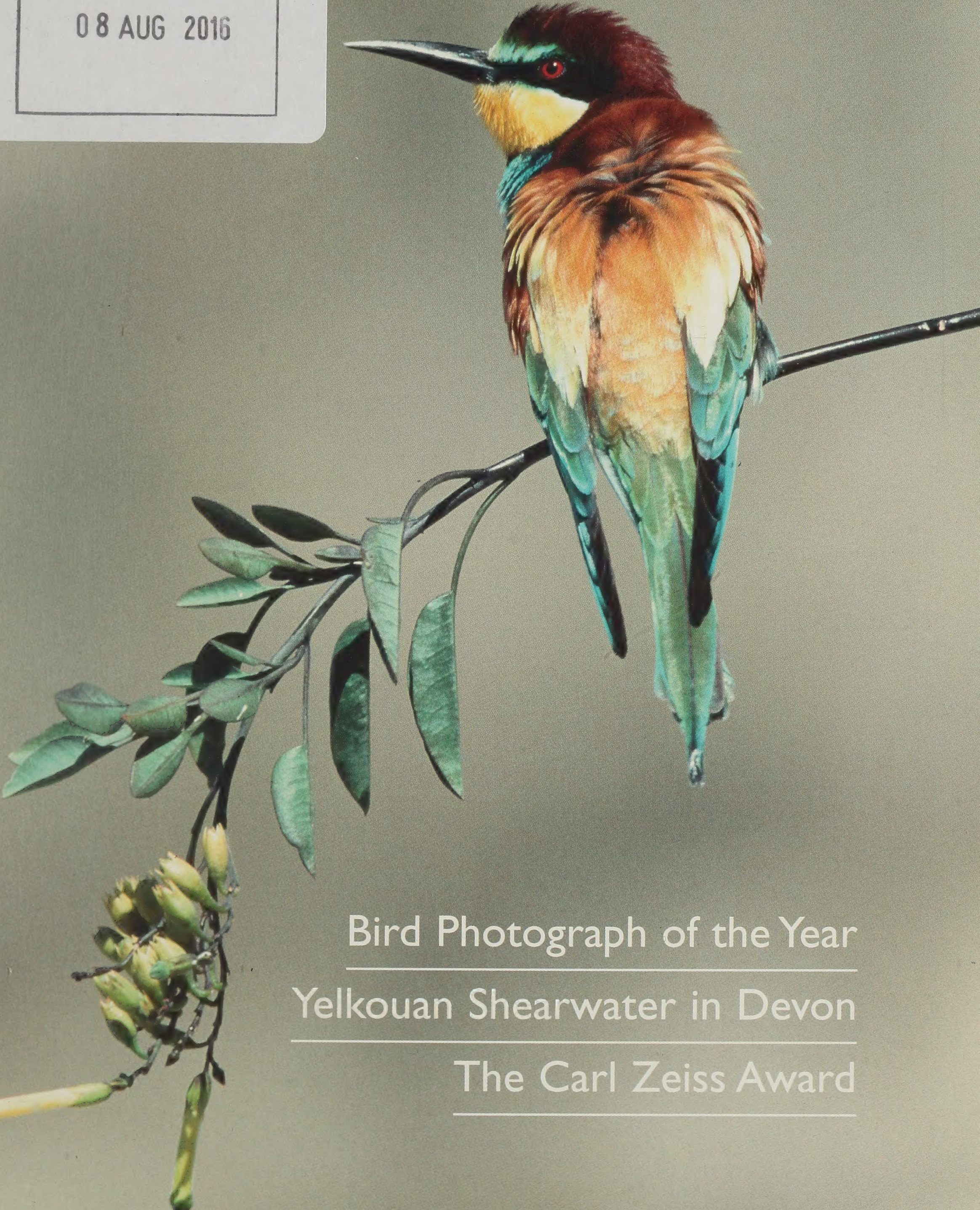

Bird Photograph of the Year

Yelkouan Shearwater in Devon

The Carl Zeiss Award

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Front-cover photograph: European Bee-eater *Merops apiaster*, Spain, May 1994 – winner of the 1995 Bird Photograph of the Year competition. *Mike Lane*

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Artwork by Carry Akroyd

Our green and pleasant land?

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When William Blake first penned his 1804 poem *'And did those feet in ancient time'* he conjured up visions of a nation full of lush landscapes and rolling vistas, habitats for wildlife and a source of economic growth.

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Chalara ash dieback
Affects: ash trees
First UK recording:
2012

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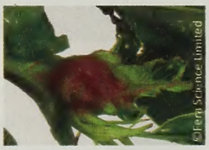
Sirococcus blight of cedar
Affects: cedar
First UK recording:
2014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Oriental chestnut gall wasp
Affects: sweet chestnut
First UK recording:
2015

*The potential ecological impact of ash dieback in the UK. JNCC report No. 483.

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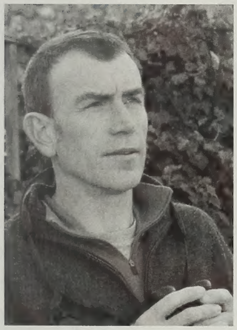

I have to confess that competitions are not really my thing, and readers will have noted a gradual pruning back of competitions in *British Birds* in the last 15 years. Nonetheless, the two awards featured in this issue have both served *BB* well. The recent change in emphasis in the Carl Zeiss Award, which now seeks to showcase the best overall submissions of rarities during the past 12 months (rather than looking specifically for photographs of particular merit), has been a good one; this year, the shortlist contains some really impressive work. Many of the more cryptic taxa on BBRC's books require more than one form of evidence in order that an identification can be treated as safely proven, so it seems entirely sensible that this competition is looking more widely than just at photographs. As well as photos and video, sound recordings and DNA evidence are almost routine these days, although it is good to see that field sketches and written observations still have a place in twenty-first century rarity recording.

The Bird Photograph of the Year award uses broadly the same set of parameters now as it did when it first appeared, 40 years ago. Yet the development of wildlife photography over the last four decades has been extraordinary, and to mark the 40th year of BPY we have an article tracing that progress as seen through the award winners, which complements the usual summary of this year's stunning shortlist.

Roger Riddington

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The plight of the world's vultures

The fact that vultures are in serious decline over most of Asia and Africa is attracting increasing international attention. Asian vulture populations are thought to stand now at less than 1% of their numbers only 25 years ago, and African populations have collapsed over the past decade or more. In every case, this is due primarily or entirely to increased poisoning. In Asia, the poisoning is unintended, resulting from the use of veterinary pharmaceuticals that happen to be lethal to vultures, whereas in Africa poisoning is often deliberate, resulting from the abuse of agricultural pesticides.

Poisons are normally the easiest and most effective way to get rid of unwanted scavengers or predators and, in cases where they are cheap and available, have been commonly used for this purpose since the nineteenth century, simply by pouring, sprinkling or smearing them on animal carcases or meat baits placed in suitable areas. Vultures are especially vulnerable to poisons for three main reasons. First, feeding largely or entirely on dead meat, they are more at risk than species that take dead meat only occasionally. They can be killed incidentally in attempts to kill other species. Second, the larger vultures, especially *Gyps* species, gather at carcases in such large numbers that tens or even hundreds can be killed at a sitting. For example, in July 2012, 191 vultures died after feasting on an elephant that had been shot and then sprinkled with poison in a Zimbabwean National Park. A year later roughly 500 vultures were killed after feeding on a poison-laced elephant in Namibia. Moreover, the extensive ranging behaviour of vultures helps them to assemble quickly in large numbers at a fresh carcase. Individuals of several *Gyps* species have been found by radio-tracking to range over thousands of square kilometres from their roosts or nesting areas to find food, and immature birds over much greater areas, sometimes covering tens or even hundreds of thousands of square kilometres (e.g. Gilbert *et al.* 2007, Garcia-Ripolles *et al.* 2011, Phipps *et al.* 2013). So even though poisoned carcases may be few and far between, each one could attract birds from a very large area.

The third reason is that the low breeding rates of vultures make it impossible for them to recover quickly from large mortality incidents, and cumulative incidents can soon lead to rapid population declines. Both large Old World vultures and New World condors are extreme among birds in their naturally high annual survival and low reproductive rates. In the absence of human intervention, annual adult survival rates can exceed 98%, and at best the adults can produce no more than one young per year, which must then normally survive for another 5–7 years before it is able to reproduce. With this type of life history, populations are highly susceptible to any increase in adult mortality. In an environment with frequent large kills from poisoning, it soon becomes impossible for a population to recover, as it is tipped instead into inexorable decline.

In Europe, vultures disappeared from large parts of their range in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, mainly in response to the use of poisons. In other parts of the world, people have long killed vultures in small numbers for local medicine, fetish or ceremonial purposes, or simply for target practice, but this level of killing is not known to have caused obvious population declines. All major declines recorded from the nineteenth century to the present seem to have been associated primarily with large-scale use of poison, where vultures were the incidental or targeted victims.

In recent years, news has emerged of major declines in vulture populations over much of Africa, resulting from the ready availability of highly toxic pesticides, such as carbofuran (Ogada 2014; Ogada *et al.* 2015a,b). One problem results from pastoralists (including the Masai) using these chemicals on carcases intended to kill lions, hyenas and other predators, with vultures killed incidentally. The other results from the growth in poaching, mainly of rhinos for their horns

Eric Hosking/FLPA

245. The Critically Endangered White-rumped Vulture *Gyps bengalensis* (photographed here in Rajasthan, India, in January 1981) was abundant in India a quarter of a century ago, but diclofenac poisoning has wiped out all but a fraction of the population.

and of elephants for their tusks. These animals are sometimes killed directly using poisoned baits, but in any case the poison is often spread on carcases of animals killed for their body parts. The aim is to deliberately kill vultures because their circling over carcases reveals the positions of poachers to anti-poaching patrols. Many of these birds are killed within national parks, the last strongholds of all these species.

Between 2012 and 2014, some 155 elephants and more than 2,044 vultures were killed in 11 known poaching-related incidents in seven African countries (Ogada *et al.* 2015a). In at least two of these incidents, the harvesting of vulture body parts may have provided an additional motive. The populations of eight of Africa's vulture species are thought to have fallen by an average of 62%, including seven that have declined by at least 80% in the past 50 years (Ogada *et al.* 2015b). Poisoning and the trade in traditional medicines together accounted for 90% of reported deaths, and collisions with power lines and wind turbines for most of the remainder. There seems little hope in reducing this widespread poisoning unless African countries curtail the easy access to highly toxic pesticides and other poisons.

In West Africa, roadside counts conducted in 1969–1973 through Burkina Faso, Mali, Niger and northern Cameroon (9,712 km) were repeated in 2000–2004 by the same observer, using the same methods, during the same season. The four large vultures had decreased dramatically (by around 98%) outside protected areas. Numbers of Hooded Vultures *Necrosyrtes monachus* had also collapsed over most of the region, but the species had survived locally (Thiollay 2007). In Ethiopia, vultures still seem relatively common, but there are no accurate estimates of population sizes or trends there.

In southern Asia, vulture declines were attributed entirely to the use of a single non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drug (NSAID), diclofenac, administered to sick animals which later died (Oaks *et al.* 2004; Newton 2007). Vultures obtained this drug from the carcases of dead livestock. It killed them within a few days through kidney failure, leaving characteristic symptoms of 'visceral gout', with white urea crystals deposited among the viscera. A demographic model showed that if only 0.13–0.75% of carcases were contaminated by diclofenac in vulture foraging areas in India, populations would be extirpated within a few years (Green *et al.* 2004). The Indian and neighbouring governments acted swiftly to ban the use of this drug for veterinary purposes from 2006, but the drug remained available for use on humans, and continued to be used illegally on livestock, though on a steadily decreasing scale. The proportion of livestock carcases found to contain the drug has declined over the years, and remaining vulture populations that have been monitored seemed to have stopped declining (Prakash *et al.* 2012). Meanwhile, however, other chemically similar drugs have been introduced into veterinary use, and at least two of these (ketoprofen and aceclofenac) have been found to kill vultures. So far, only one NSAID, called meloxicam, is known not to kill vultures. Clearly, unless all such drugs can be tested beforehand, and their release made contingent on lack of effect on vultures, these birds will remain highly vulnerable to this group of chemicals used on livestock.

To gain further information on NSAIDs, surveys of veterinarians and zoos documented the outcomes of the treatment of over 870 scavenging birds from 79 species (Cuthbert *et al.* 2007). As well as diclofenac, carprofen and flunixin were associated with mortality, with deaths observed in 13% and 30% of cases, respectively. Mortality was also found following treatment with ibuprofen and phenylbutazone. NSAID-related deaths were reported for raptors, storks, cranes and owls, suggesting that the potential conservation impact of NSAIDs could extend well beyond *Gyps* vultures. In contrast, no mortalities were reported for meloxicam, which was administered to over 700 birds from 60 species, supporting the findings mentioned above.

Meanwhile, diclofenac and other NSAIDs had also come into veterinary use in Africa and South America, thus threatening scavenging birds over much larger parts of the world. In view of the amount of research done on the problem of NSAID use, it came as a shock in March 2013 when the Spanish Drug and Health Products Agency authorised

Roger Tidman/FLPA

246. Griffon *Gyps fulvus* and Eurasian Black *Aegypius monachus* Vultures at a feeding station in Castile & León, Spain, September 2014. Spain has around 26,000 pairs of the former and 2,000 pairs of the latter species, so the decision to authorise two products containing diclofenac for veterinary use could have a serious impact on vulture populations in Europe.

the veterinary use of two products containing diclofenac (Diclovet and Dolofenac; Margalida *et al.* 2014). Of the total number of vultures in Europe, 95% are in Spain, which holds an estimated 26,000 pairs of Griffon *Gyps fulvus*, 1,600 pairs of Egyptian *Neophron percnopterus*, 2,000 pairs of Eurasian Black *Aegypius monachus* and 125 pairs of Bearded Vultures, or Lammergeiers *Gypaetus barbatus*. The use of this product could therefore seriously jeopardise the last remaining large populations of vultures in the EU, and strong representations have been made to the Spanish authorities in fruitless attempts to get this authorisation overturned. Dead vultures containing the NSAID flunixin (obtained from treated cattle) have been found in Spain and Israel, with the usual symptoms of visceral gout.

Table 1. The current conservation status of the Old World's 16 vulture species. Details from the IUCN Red List of threatened species (version 2015-4). CE – Critically Endangered, EN – Endangered, NT – Near Threatened, LC – Least Concern.
* Less dependent on carrion than other species, so much less vulnerable to poisoning.

Africa	
Palm Nut Vulture *Gypohierax angolensis**	LC
Hooded Vulture *Necrosyrtes monachus*	CE
White-backed Vulture *Gyps africanus*	CE
Cape Vulture *Gyps coprotheres*	EN
Rüppell's Vulture *Gyps rueppellii*	CE
Lappet-faced Vulture *Torgos tracheliotus*	EN
White-headed Vulture *Trigonoceps occipitalis*	CE
Asia	
White-rumped Vulture *Gyps bengalensis*	CE
Himalayan Griffon *Gyps himalayensis*	NT
Indian (Long-billed) Vulture *Gyps indicus*	CE
Slender-billed Vulture *Gyps tenuirostris*	CE
Red-headed Vulture *Sarcogyps calvus*	CE
Europe and Asia	
Eurasian Black Vulture *Aegypius monachus*	NT
Europe, Asia and Africa	
Egyptian Vulture *Neophron percnopterus*	EN
Bearded Vulture *Gypaetus barbatus*	NT
Griffon Vulture *Gyps fulvus*	LC

Vultures perform a crucial but greatly underrated service: namely the rapid clean-up and recycling of dead animals. Without vultures, stinking carcases would last longer, insect populations would boom, and diseases would spread – to people, livestock, and other wild animals less able than vultures to deal with any pathogens present (Ogada *et al.* 2012). The loss of vultures consequently has serious environmental consequences for livestock and human health. By eating carcases as soon as they become available, vultures can suppress the spread of diseases. Their exceptionally acidic gastric juices enable them to neutralise pathogens such as anthrax, cholera, brucellosis, tuberculosis, rabies and many other disease agents which can harm humans and livestock. With the loss of vultures, carnivorous mammals usually increase, on the strength of food previously consumed rapidly by vultures, bringing other problems. For example, between 1992 and 2003 in India, when vulture populations declined by approximately 99%, feral dog populations increased from 22 to 29 million (despite widespread sterilisation programmes), and instances of human dog bites increased to 39 million, causing an estimated 48,000 additional human rabies mortalities (Markandya *et al.* 2008). The total health costs over the period 1992 to 2006 resulting from the loss of vultures in India was estimated at between Rs. 998 billion and Rs. 1,095 billion, with the costs being greater in later years.

In Kenya, Ogada *et al.* (2012) examined whether the absence of vultures changed carcase decomposition time, the number of mammalian scavengers visiting carcases, the time spent by mammals at carcases, and the potential for disease transmission at carcases (measured by changes in intraspecific contact rates). In the absence of vultures, there was a nearly three-fold increase in all these measures, supporting the view that changes in vulture abundance are likely to affect patterns of disease transmission among mammalian carnivores and other animals.

To set against these happenings in Asia and Africa and news of diclofenac use in Spain, there have been some conservation successes in Europe, as different species of vultures have been reintroduced to regions from which they were eliminated in the past.

The first example involved the re-establishment of Griffon Vultures in the Massif Central of France, but since then other species have been involved in many different parts of Europe. For example, in 2015 some 20 Bearded Vultures had fledged from nests of the reintroduced population of 37 pairs in the Alps; the first successful breeding of this species occurred in Andalusia for 32 years; and 15 birds were released from a captive-breeding network in three reintroduction projects (Andalusia, Grands Causses, Alps). Successful breeding of Griffon Vultures in the central Balkan mountains occurred among birds obtained from Spain; six captive-bred Egyptian Vultures were released in a pilot reintroduction project in southern Italy; more Eurasian Black Vultures were transported to France to add to the reintroduced population there, which now numbers 35 pairs, and plans are afoot to reintroduce the species to Bulgaria.

Presently, at least 13 of 23 (61%) vulture species worldwide, and at least 11 of 16 (69%) Old World species, can be considered at risk of extinction (in the IUCN categories of Endangered or Critically Endangered), and the most rapid declines have occurred in the vulture-rich regions of Asia and Africa (Ogada *et al.* 2011, 2015b, table 1). In response to the recent crisis in Africa, the BirdLife Partnership has produced a ten-year plan which seeks to address the problems of vulture declines there. *British Birds* recently gave a conservation grant towards this programme.

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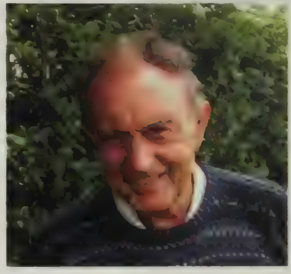
Ian Newton



Ian Newton has had a lifelong interest in birds, especially birds of prey, and has studied them as a career for more than 40 years at what is now the Centre for Ecology & Hydrology. In his spare time, he does more of the same things. His main interests are in population ecology and migration.

News and comment

Compiled by Adrian Pitches

Opinions expressed in this feature are not necessarily those of *British Birds*

'Tiny handful' of Hen Harriers nest in England in 2016

When RSPB Conservation Director Martin Harper blogged in June that 'the news on the ground suggests this is shaping up to be a very poor year for England's Hen Harriers *Circus cyaneus* with only a tiny handful of nesting attempts to date' (http://bit.ly/28W4yQw), it wasn't clear what 'a tiny handful' meant. Now we know: there have been just three nesting attempts by Hen Harriers in England in 2016.

The good news that a female Hen Harrier was brooding five eggs on the RSPB Geltsdale reserve in Cumbria came in another RSPB blog at the end of June (http://bit.ly/28XRPwW), but it also confirmed that there were only two other pairs nesting in the uplands of northern England, an area that could support more than 100 times that number.

Project Manager of the RSPB's (EU-funded) Hen Harrier project, Blanaid Denman, reported: 'The Geltsdale nest is one of only three active nests in England this year and, if successful, these will be the first Hen Harrier chicks to have fledged from Geltsdale since 2006 – exactly ten years. A similar nesting attempt last year resulted in failure when the male Hen Harrier suddenly and inexplicably disappeared while hunting away from the nest. With the Government and landowners now officially committed to the recovery of the species through the Defra Hen Harrier Action Plan, we have spoken to our neighbouring estates so they can play their part in helping to ensure that this year's birds are safe when they leave our reserve to hunt.'

Of course, last year's male 'disappeared' when he left the safety of the reserve to hunt over neighbouring grouse moors. He was one of five male Hen Harriers who 'disappeared' in 2015 while foraging for their mates, all of which subsequently abandoned their nests rather than starve when the males failed to return. Despite this huge setback, six pairs of Hen Harriers nested successfully in England in 2015, twice the number reported in 2016.

Steve Westerberg, Site Manager at RSPB Geltsdale, said: 'We're delighted that we have Hen Harriers breeding on the reserve once again. It's an incredibly nerve-wracking time but we're crossing our fingers that we'll see fledged young. Staff and volunteers are watching the nest around the clock to prevent unnecessary disturbance.'

The third annual Hen Harrier Day, with events held across the country in advance of the grouse shooting season, takes place on Sunday 7th August. See henharrierday.org for the event nearest to you. A picnic in support of Hen Harriers took place at Grimwith Reservoir in the Yorkshire Dales on 25th June attended by 75 people. Mark Avery's e-petition to ban driven grouse shooting has now attracted well over 60,000 signatures: https://petition.parliament.uk/petitions/125003 And Mark will go head to head with the game shooting fraternity in a debate 'Should driven grouse shooting be banned?' in the Events Marquee at the Birdfair on Friday 19th August at 4.45 pm – straight after the *BB* Bird Photograph of the Year and Carl Zeiss Award presentations, in fact.

Norway proposes to cull Golden Eagles

The Norwegian Parliament has requested a change in legislation that will make it easier to cull Golden Eagles *Aquila chrysaetos* in two separate areas of the country (the Fosen peninsula in central Norway, and Troms county in northern Norway). This could result in more than 200 Golden Eagles being killed.

Norsk Ornitologisk Forening (BirdLife in Norway) says this is a result of pressure from sheep and reindeer farmers, who believe that a reduction in the number of eagles will result in fewer livestock lost.

Vigorous debate has erupted in Norway around this potential change in the protection of the Golden Eagle, given that Norwegian law has protected birds of prey since 1968 and Norway's Environment Agency does not support the proposal.

NOF says the belief that an eagle cull will reduce the deaths of livestock is unsupported by the scientific evidence and sets a dangerous precedent for other Nordic and European countries. Extensive scientific evidence cited by NOF indicates that the loss of livestock to Golden Eagles is not related to the eagles' population density. Kjetil Solbakken, CEO of NOF, said: 'Shooting Golden Eagles is unheard of in Europe. The removal of Golden Eagles that haven't caused any damage will almost certainly... place Norway in the international Hall of Shame.'

The population levels of all of Norway's large carnivores are extremely low because the Norwegian Parliament has decreed it. There has been systematic culling of large carnivores in Norway since the seventeenth century, more recently enshrined in the so-called 'Predator agreement' agreed by the Norwegian Parliament in 2011. The parliament has decided that the Wolf *Canis lupus* population shall be kept at a Critically Endangered level and that the Brown Bear *Ursus arctos*, Eurasian Lynx *Lynx lynx* and Wolverine *Gulo gulo* are restricted to Endangered status as their populations are not permitted to grow above narrow limits set by the parliament. The Golden Eagle has so far avoided this control regime and currently has a stable and natural population size which BirdLife Norway has struggled to maintain.

Norway is not a member of the EU and therefore not constrained by the Birds Directive. However, it is a signatory of the Bern Convention on the Conservation of European Wildlife and Natural Habitats.

EU investigates Białowieża logging

The European Union has launched an investigation into the Polish Government's decision to allow logging in the Białowieża Forest, a UNESCO Biosphere Reserve, which is Europe's last remnant of primeval lowland forest. (See Łukasz Ławicki's account from June's *BB* on our website: www.britishbirds.co.uk/article/bialowieza-forest-new-threat).

Białowieża (which straddles the Poland/Belarus border) is home to 60 mammal species, while its internationally significant bird populations (in the 62,000 ha Polish portion of the forest) number more than 240 species, including ten breeding species of woodpecker, all of which rely on old-growth forest with plenty of dead wood and nesting holes.

Despite the huge ecological value of the forest, the Polish environment minister has approved a plan by the State Forest Administration to more than treble the amount of timber acquired from Białowieża – from the previously agreed 60,000 m^3 to more than 190,000 m^3 in the next decade.

Robert Canis/FLPA

247. White-backed Woodpecker *Dendrocopos leucotos*, Białowieża Forest, Poland, February 2014 – one of ten breeding species of woodpecker in the forest.

Now the European Commission has responded to this flagrant disregard for both the Birds and the Habitats EU Directives. 'The Commission has launched an infringement procedure against Poland... the Commission is in contact with the Polish authorities to make sure that any measures are in line with EU law,' a spokesman said.

'Polish authorities have one month to provide the information requested and once received, the Commission will carefully assess this to decide whether further action is necessary.' Brussels and Warsaw are already at loggerheads over changes to Poland's constitutional court, which the EU has warned could merit sanctions as a 'systemic threat' to the rule of law.

The Polish Government began logging in May, claiming it was clearing dead trees to prevent damage caused by the European Spruce Bark Beetle *Ips typographus*, in line with EU regulations. Polish environmentalists said the logging would destroy an ecosystem untouched for more than 10,000 years and complained to the European Commission.

Little Gulls nest in Scotland

The RSPB has revealed that the first breeding attempt by Little Gulls *Hydrocoloeus minutus* in Scotland has taken place at its Loch of Strathbeg reserve, north of Aberdeen. The Rare Breeding Birds Panel (RBBP) archive www.rbbp.org.uk confirms that this is only the sixth breeding record for Britain (all of the previous attempts were in England, and the most recent was in Norfolk in 2007). Recently fledged juveniles were seen in Angus & Dundee in both 1988 and 1991 but it was not clear where they had fledged from.

Little Gulls have never successfully raised chicks in Britain, so hopes were high that this pair would be the first. The pair nested on a tern island and could be monitored using the reserve's drone carrying a video camera. The nest was put under 24-hour watch and in early July it was announced that two chicks had hatched successfully. RBBP's Mark Holling commented that, if all goes well, these would be the first Little Gulls certainly to have been raised in the UK. (You can read the latest RBBP report in next month's *BB*.)

Richard Humpidge, RSPB Scotland Sites Manager, said: 'We're really excited to have these smashing little birds nesting on the reserve. A few years back, we did a lot of work on our tern nesting island, reshaping it and adding ten tons of shingle and shelters, as well as installing a fence around the edge of the pool to prevent access by ground predators.

'It's been a great success: four years ago there were just ten pairs of Common Terns *Sterna hirundo* and they failed to raise any chicks. The next year there were 60 pairs, and this year we have 130 pairs and their eggs are just starting to hatch. It's great that the Little Gulls are using the same area and we hope that it will also give them the protection they need to raise their chicks.' For details of visiting the reserve, see rspb.org.uk/lochofstrathbeg

Spoon-billed Sandpipers hatch at Slimbridge

They are the only chicks of the critically endangered Spoon-billed Sandpiper *Calidris pygmeus* ever bred in captivity, but sadly neither survived for more than 60 hours. Each weighed only a few grams and was barely bigger than a bumblebee.

Seven eggs were laid in total at WWT Slimbridge Wetland Centre in Gloucestershire, of which only two were fertile. The first chick hatched on 2nd July and it became clear quite soon that it wasn't well and nothing could be done. The second chick hatched on 3rd July and put up a brave effort; it filled everyone's ears with lots of chirrupy noise and brought smiles to everyone as it seemed to be thriving and developing well. But despite 24-hour expert care, on the afternoon of 5th July its health suddenly deteriorated and it died soon after. The causes of death aren't yet known. A specialist post-mortem will be undertaken for both chicks.

The deaths are particularly upsetting for the team at WWT because it has taken three years of encouragement for the 23-strong captive flock at Slimbridge to attempt to breed. This has huge implications for the species as a whole, because only around 200 pairs survive in the wild and the purpose of the Slimbridge flock is to create a captive 'ark' of breeding birds to keep the species alive if attempts to stop the bird going extinct in the wild aren't successful.

WWT's Nigel Jarrett said: 'We're absolutely devastated, but we're trying to keep in mind that this has still been a positive step towards establishing a viable breeding population of Spoon-billed Sandpipers for conservation.'

A fuller update on the project will be published in *BB* soon.

Debbie Pain moves to WLT from WWT

The World Land Trust has appointed Debbie Pain as its new Chief Executive Officer. She joins WLT after nine years at the Wildfowl and Wetlands Trust as Director of Conservation where she has overseen the rescue projects for two of the world's most threatened species: Spoon-billed Sandpiper and Madagascar Pochard *Aythya innotata*. She previously worked at the RSPB, latterly as Head of International Research investigating the cause of the catastrophic population crash of Asian vultures.

Debbie said: 'I am absolutely delighted to be coming to work for WLT. Habitat loss is probably the greatest threat to the world's wildlife, and WLT helps protect some of the most important places. By always working through local partners, WLT does this in a really effective way that works for wildlife and local people.' Since its foundation in 1989, WLT has secured protection for half a million acres of the most threatened habitats worldwide by funding partner organisations to create reserves run by local people on a sustainable basis.

Eight more satellite-tagged Cuckoos head south

Common Cuckoos *Cuculus canorus* from Sherwood Forest, the New Forest, Thetford Forest and Dartmoor are the latest birds to be satellite-tagged by the BTO team tracking Cuckoo migration to Africa and back again. The eight new birds join the four surviving individuals tagged in previous years. Seven of the 12 had already left the UK by the end of June. Previous birds have taken two different routes to Africa: a western route via Spain or an eastern route via Italy. Some of the Class of 2016 will stop over in southern Spain, to feed and fatten up before attempting the crossing of the Sahara, while others will do the same in northern Italy and the Balkans, allowing researchers to compare the success of the western versus the eastern migration route with that of previous years.

Each bird will make the desert crossing in one 2,000-mile non-stop flight. What BTO scientists are very keen to learn is how the birds interact with the Inter Tropical Convergence Zone (ITCZ) weather system as they prepare to return to Britain next spring. The rains that the ITCZ brings to West Africa in early March may be vital to the success of onward migration from countries such as Sierra Leone, Ivory Coast and Ghana. The Cuckoo Project's Phil Atkinson said: 'Five years into the project we know a lot about the migration routes our Cuckoos take to and from Africa but now we need to focus our attention on how the weather conditions along these routes might be affecting the timing of the migration. With the use of these amazing little satellite tag "backpacks", we can watch these Cuckoos in near real-time as they move around the planet. It's a very exciting time. The journey south and then back again is fraught with danger so we will be keeping everything crossed for these amazing birds.'

See www.bto.org/science/migration/tracking-studies/cuckoo-tracking

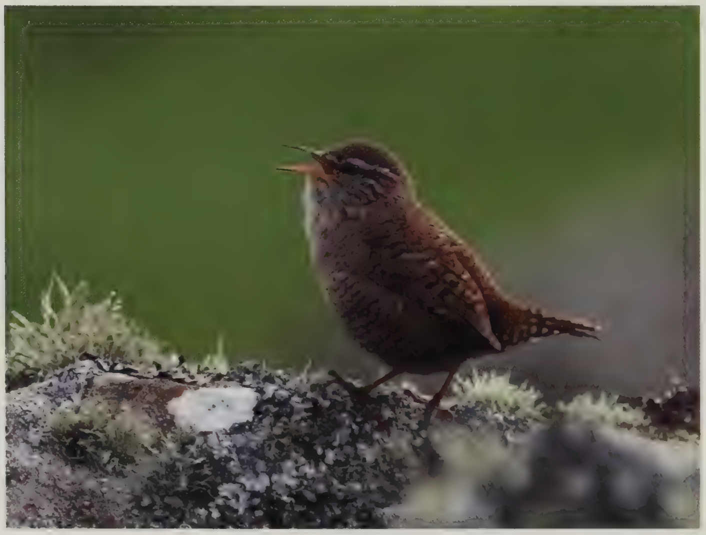
Northern Wrens are tougher than southern softies

New research published in the Royal Society journal *Open Science* reveals that one of our most widespread songbirds, the Wren *Troglodytes troglodytes*, varies in its resilience to winter weather, depending on where in Britain it lives. Scottish Wrens are larger than those living in southern Britain, and more resilient to hard winter frosts.

Populations of small birds may decline following periods of cold winter weather, something that is probably linked to both low temperatures and difficulties in finding sufficient invertebrate prey. So we might expect populations inhabiting regions where winters are more severe to show some form of adaptation, and this is exactly what researchers at the BTO have found. They used information on Wren populations taken from the Breeding Bird Survey and found that the birds were susceptible to severe winter weather, measured in terms of the number of days with a ground frost. However, northern populations were found to be resilient to winters with up to 70% more frost days than southern populations, suggesting a degree of local adaptation.

James Pearce-Higgins (BTO Director of Science and one of the authors) commented: 'This work indicates that each Wren population is closely adapted to its local climate; there was a close correlation between the historical regional climate and the degree to which the population was resilient to severe winters.'

Using information collected by ringers, the team also found that Wren body mass was approximately 5% lower in the warmest region (southwest England) than in



Roger Riddington

248. Shetland Wren *Troglodytes troglodytes zetlandicus* – one of several distinctive island forms of the Wren that occur in Scotland; June 2015.

the coldest region (eastern Scotland). As lead author Catriona Morrison, from the University of East Anglia, noted: 'Large individuals are likely to be favoured in colder regions due to the thermal advantage of larger size and their ability to store more body fat, and our findings match the pattern seen more widely across other species – a pattern known as Bergmann's rule.'

British Birds at the Birdfair

British Birds will once again be attending the Birdfair www.birdfair.org.uk at Rutland Water, on 19th–21st August, with some special events planned for the weekend. This is the 40th year of our Bird Photograph of the Year competition (see pp. 434–447 and 464–474) and our stand in Marquee 3 will be showcasing the winning photos from 'BPY40'. The winning photographers will receive their awards from Simon King in the Events Marquee on the Friday afternoon at 4.00 pm, when the Carl Zeiss Award (see pp. 457–463) will also be presented, by BBRC Chairman Paul French.

And if you sit tight in the Events Marquee, through the BPY/CZA prize-giving (and the grouse-shooting debate that follows), the highlight of Friday evening will be the *British Birds*/RSPB Birders event at 6.00 pm: 'Frontiers of Migration', three short lectures by friends and colleagues of Martin Garner, in celebration of his birding life.

Be sure to visit the *BB* stand to say hello, pick up back issues and binders – and to see a demonstration of our digital edition. And don't forget to collect a copy of the free *BB*/RSPB 2016 checklist with the latest version of the British List.

British List continues to grow

The BOU Records Committee has had a busy year: 2016 had already brought the 600th and 601st species for the British List, namely Yelkouan Shearwater *Puffinus yelkouan* (see pp. 448–456) and Cackling Goose *Branta hutchinsii* respectively. Then in July came news of the addition of two further species: Chinese Pond Heron *Ardeola bacchus* and Slaty-backed Gull *Larus schistisagus*, which take the total on to 603 (see www.bou.org.uk/british-list). Surprisingly, Mugimaki Flycatcher *Ficedula mugimaki* has moved down rather than up the charts, and is now placed in Category E, although the bird at Stone Creek, Yorkshire, in November 1991, is considered by many birders to have been a genuine vagrant.

Au revoir, Jeremy

Jeremy Greenwood has come to the end of his term as a Trustee of the *British Birds* Charitable Trust. Plate 249 shows him being presented with a Robert Gillmor painting of Common Guillemots *Uria aalge* by Ian Newton at the *BB* meeting at RSPB Minsmere in April this year. Jeremy is the last of the Famous Five who founded BB2000 Ltd and helped to pull *British Birds* back from the brink of closure – so this is the end of a significant chapter in the magazine's history. Jeremy, who was the BTO's Director when he first joined the *BB* team, first as a Director, then a Trustee, has made an enormous contribution, covering all aspects of the business. He will be sorely missed, but we look forward to more contributions as papers, notes and letters – now that he has that much more time on his hands…

What's so special about reedbeds?

Adrian Pitches

249. Jeremy Greenwood and Ian Newton, April 2016.

For extended versions of many of the stories featured here, and much more, visit our website www.britishbirds.co.uk

Bird Photograph of the Year 2016

This is the 40th Bird Photograph of the Year competition, and the article elsewhere in this issue (pp. 464–474) celebrates the journey of this award, from its beginnings in the mid 1970s. Forty years ago, wildlife photography was an exclusive pursuit. Camera equipment was expensive and heavy, while getting close enough to the subject to generate a publishable image meant that shots away from the nest required an abundance of creative fieldcraft. Bird photographers were the 'hunters' of the birdwatching world.

Yet the 1970s was also the decade in which that began to change, albeit slowly. Nonetheless, for many years, the annual account of the judging process and the summary of the winning images in *BB* searched for new ways to say the same thing: 'the standard this year is even better than it was last year!' Photographic equipment has evolved pretty much continuously over the lifespan of this competition, but the arrival of the digital format was more revolution than evolution. Although there was an uneasy crossover period in the early 2000s, by 2006 – when for the first time all the entries in the BPY shortlist were digital – the days of film already felt like a bygone era.

And as camera gear became better, and more portable, it has also become more affordable. The biggest telephoto lenses still cost an arm and a leg, but there is plenty of choice for people who want decent kit in a lower price range. And while fieldcraft is still an important part of wildlife photography, there is so much more flexibility now; the opportunities to be creative, and to take advantage of chance encounters, are almost limitless. This has been particularly important for BPY, which has always attempted to showcase interesting aspects of bird behaviour: action rather than portraiture has been the watchword, and our winner this year is a prime example.

The rise of social media and the fact that nowadays almost everyone carries a mobile phone with a decent camera means that anyone can become a photographer. Images have become central to the way that we now communicate. Photography in all its forms has been a key part of how we learn and understand more about natural history, and this competition has played a small but perhaps significant role in that. The proliferation of much larger wildlife-photography competitions in recent years is certainly testimony to the format. One thing is for sure, there is no evidence that our appetite for the very best bird photographs is waning, and we are pleased to introduce another fine crop from this year's competition.

Sponsorship

We thank our loyal supporters of many years, Christopher Helm/Bloomsbury (www.bloomsbury.com), William Collins (WilliamCollinsBooks.com) and the Eric Hosking Charitable Trust (www.erichoskingtrust.com). Last but not least, we thank Simon King (www.simonkingwildlife.com) for once again giving his time to present our awards at the British Birdwatching Fair. The Friday afternoon slot when the awards are presented is one of the undoubted highlights of the *BB* year, and we hope to see as many readers as possible there to celebrate with us. This year, the date for your diary is Friday 19th August, but the top images will be on show at our stand (Marquee 3, stands 24/25) throughout the Birdfair.

The 2016 shortlist

In last year's competition, the fact that three judges voted for the same photograph as their winner was unusual enough. Yet this year, *all six* judges voted for the same image as their favourite, which is extraordinary. Anthony Loaring's shot of a Common Kestrel *Falco tinnunculus* attempting to snatch a vole from a Barn Owl *Tyto alba* is an exceptional photograph, packed with action, truly a story within a single image. Technically, the angle

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of both birds to the photographer is just right, the sight line of both birds shows exactly where they are heading and both of the subjects are in focus, bathed in the soft evening light. Anthony's photograph (plate 250) is a fitting overall winner of the 40th *British Birds* Bird Photograph of the Year award.

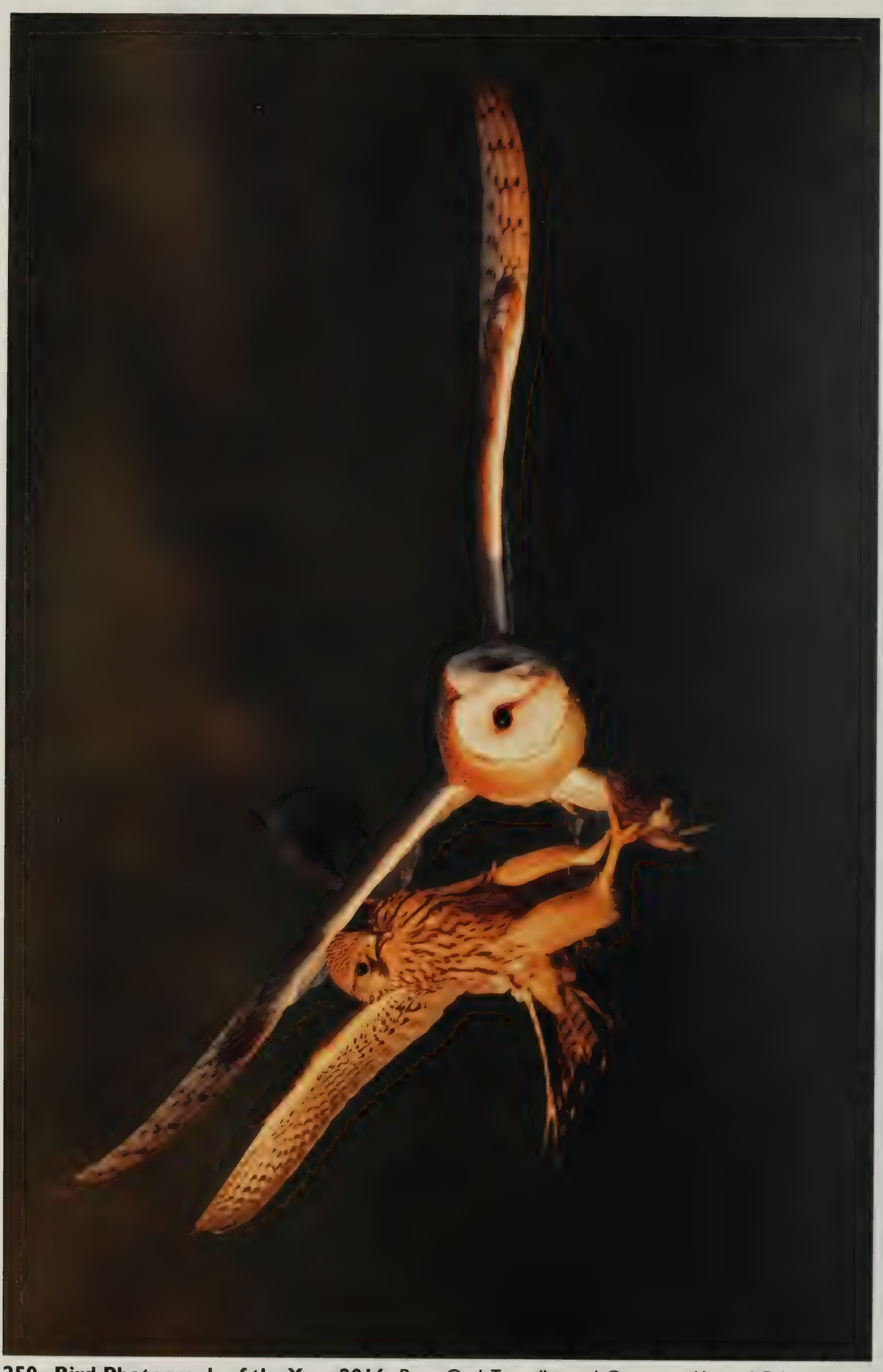
Anthony photographed this encounter at the Mont Cuet Landfill Site in Guernsey on 25th September 2015: 'I had been out birding all day and found myself at Chouet; since it was a nice evening, I decided to see if the Barn Owls were out. I walked up the lane that divides the local landfill site from the driving range of the golf club; this part of the site has been reclaimed by nature and is a perfect hunting ground for birds of prey. Other photographers were already there and told me that the owls were out. I got into position, perched on a stone plinth about 80 cm high, which gave a better view over the chain-link fence that borders the landfill site. I adjusted my camera settings, then watched as a Barn Owl dropped then caught a vole and started to fly along the edge of the fence towards me. Steadying myself, I got the owl in my viewfinder and when it came close enough I started to take some shots. Suddenly, when it was about 50–60 m away, a Kestrel burst into view. At that point I just tried to keep both birds in the frame and the shutter going until the birds parted, after which I jumped down and had a look at what I'd got. I have to say that I was very pleased to have taken a few nice shots, the one entered being the best.'

Many birders have witnessed the late-autumn arrival of Short-eared Owls *Asio flammeus* on the east coast of Britain as they battle against the elements to make landfall. Graham Catley's powerful image captures the drama of a Short-eared Owl flying into a strong headwind, narrowly avoiding the breakers as it makes for the shore (plate 251). The viewer is left wondering… will it make it? This image epitomises the hazards that birds face each autumn as they arrive in Britain having crossed the North Sea. On

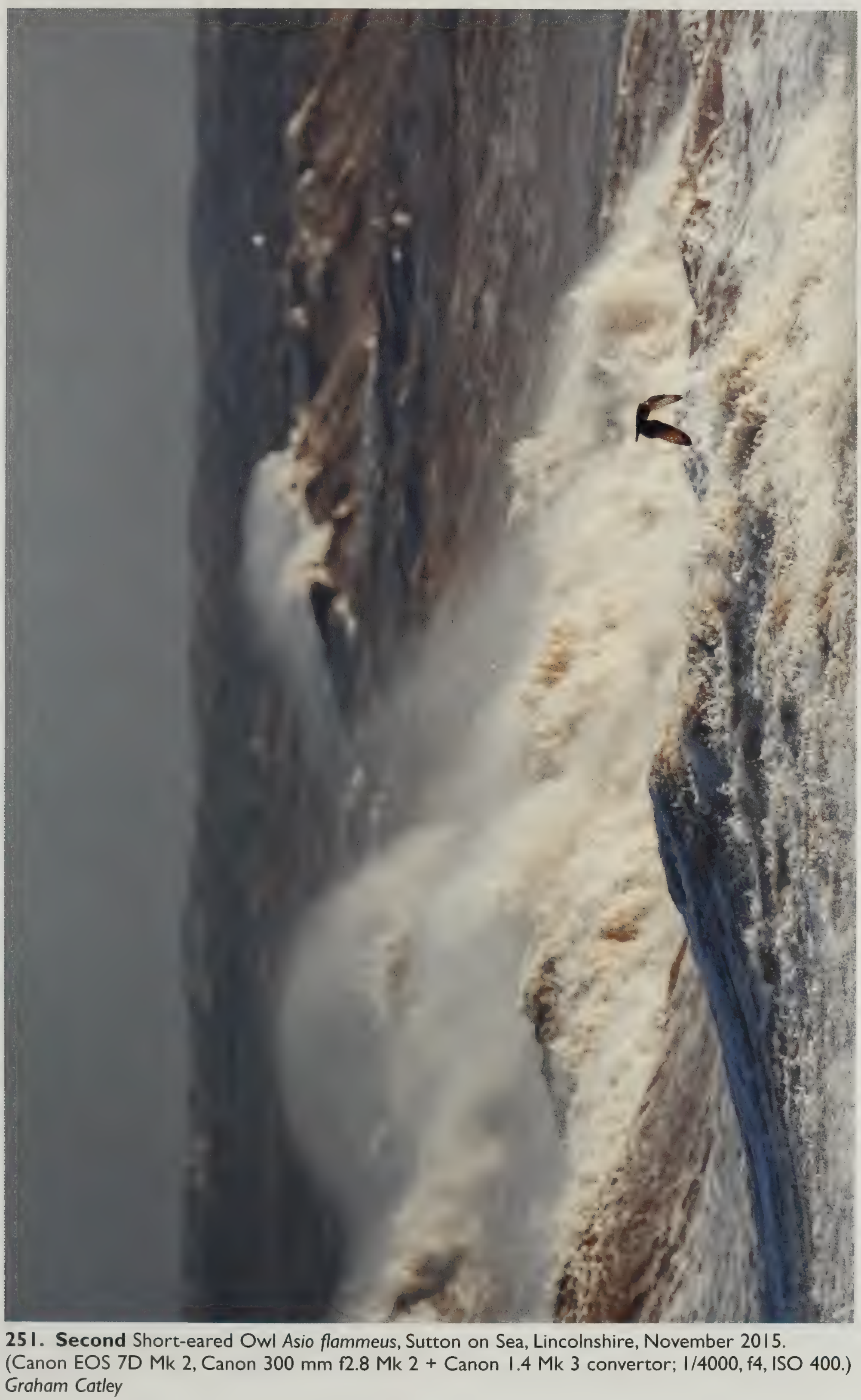
1st	**Barn Owl *Tyto alba* and Common Kestrel *Falco tinnunculus***	**plate 250**	**Anthony Loaring**
2nd	Short-eared Owl *Asio flammeus*	plate 251	Graham Catley
3rd	Common Raven *Corvus corax*	plate 252	Mark Hamblin
4th	Golden Eagle *Aquila chrysaetos*	plate 253	Robert Snell
5th	Puffins *Fratercula arctica*	plate 254	Helen Brassington
6th	Little Owl *Athene noctua*	plate 255	Austin Thomas
7th=	Common Starlings *Sturnus vulgaris*	plate 256	Oliver Smart
7th=	Citrine Wagtail *Motacilla citreola*	plate 257	George Reszeter
9th	Great Cormorant *Phalacrocorax carbo*	plate 258	Tony Clarke
10th	Wood Pigeon *Columba palumbus*	plate 259	Gary Spicer
11th	Common Kestrel *Falco tinnunculus*	plate 260	Austin Thomas
12th	Common Sandpiper *Actitis hypoleucos*	plate 261	Gary Waddington
13th	Namaqua Dove *Oena capensis*	plate 262	George Reszeter
14th	Blue Tits *Cyanistes caeruleus*	plate 263	Arto Juvonen
15th=	Bearded Tit *Panurus biarmicus*		Markus Varesvuo
15th=	Pine Grosbeak *Pinicola enucleator*		Niko Pekonen
17th	Peregrine Falcon *Falco peregrinus*, Eurasian Teal *Anas crecca* and Black-tailed Godwits *Limosa limosa*		Gary Waddington
18th	Lammergeier *Gypaetus barbatus*		Bill Baston
19th	Siberian Jay *Perisoreus infaustus*		Peter Beesley
20th	Little Owl *Athene noctua*		Tibor Kercz

Digiscoped entries

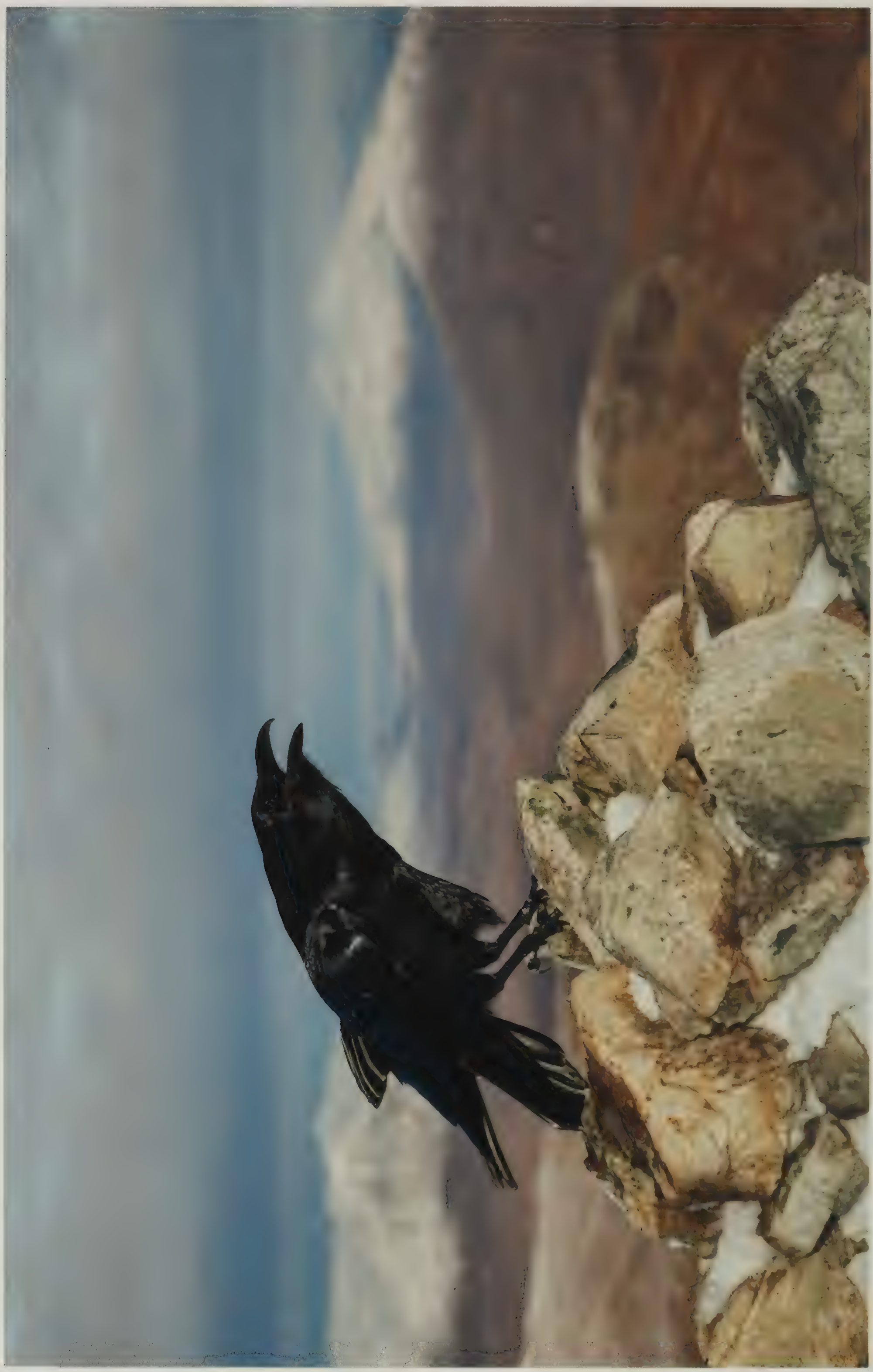
1st	Harlequin Duck *Histrionicus histrionicus*	plate 264	Kris Gibb
2nd	Slavonian Grebe *Podiceps auritus*		Gary Waddington
3rd	Gyr Falcon *Falco rusticolus*		Kris Gibb



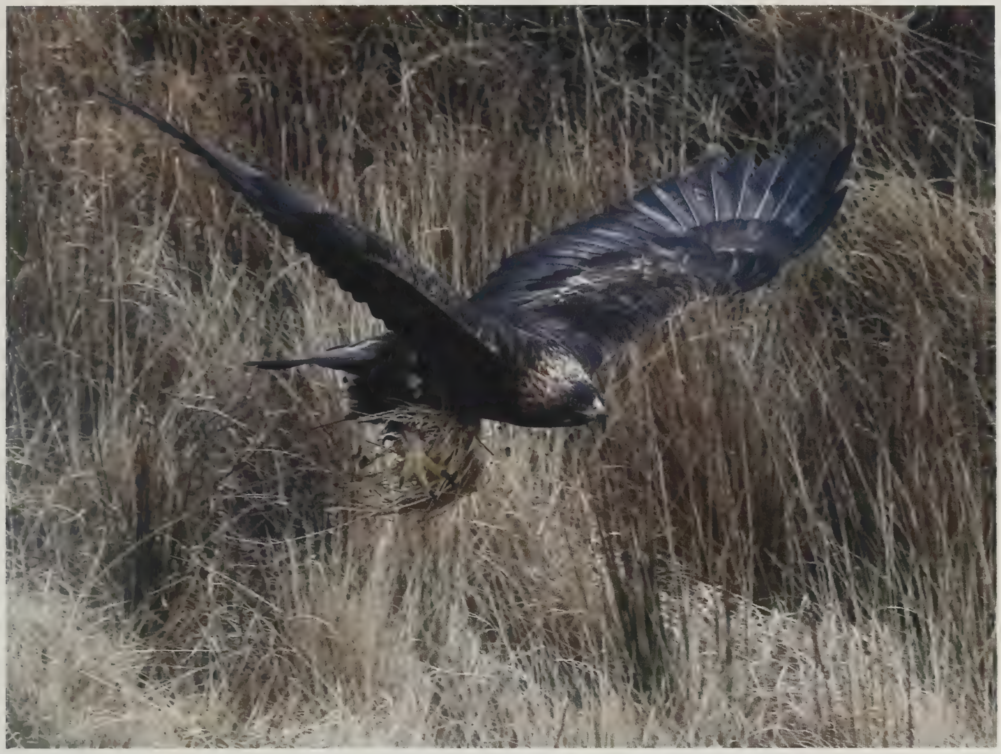
250. Bird Photograph of the Year 2016 Barn Owl *Tyto alba* and Common Kestrel *Falco tinnunculus*, Guernsey, Channel Islands, September 2015. (Canon EOS 7D Mk 2, Canon 500 mm f4 Mk 2; 1/2000, f5.6, ISO 1600.) *Anthony Loaring*



251. Second Short-eared Owl *Asio flammeus*, Sutton on Sea, Lincolnshire, November 2015. (Canon EOS 7D Mk 2, Canon 300 mm f2.8 Mk 2 + Canon 1.4 Mk 3 convertor; 1/4000, f4, ISO 400.) *Graham Catley*



252. Third Common Raven *Corvus corax*, Glen Coe, Argyll, November 2015. (Canon EOS 5D Mk 2, Canon 24–105 mm zoom @ 90 mm; 1/500, f6.3, ISO 200.) *Mark Hamblin*

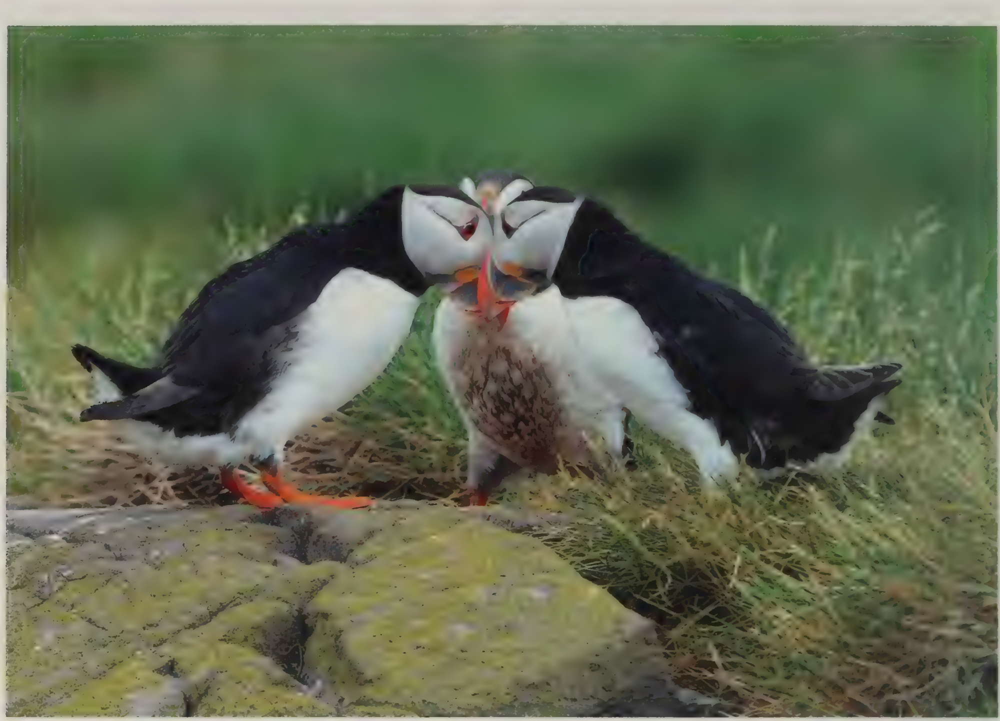


Robert Snell

253. Fourth Golden Eagle *Aquila chrysaetos*, Mull, Argyll, February 2016. (Canon EOS 7D Mk 2, Canon 500 mm f4 + Canon 1.4 Mk 3 converter; 1/500, f5.6, ISO 1250.)

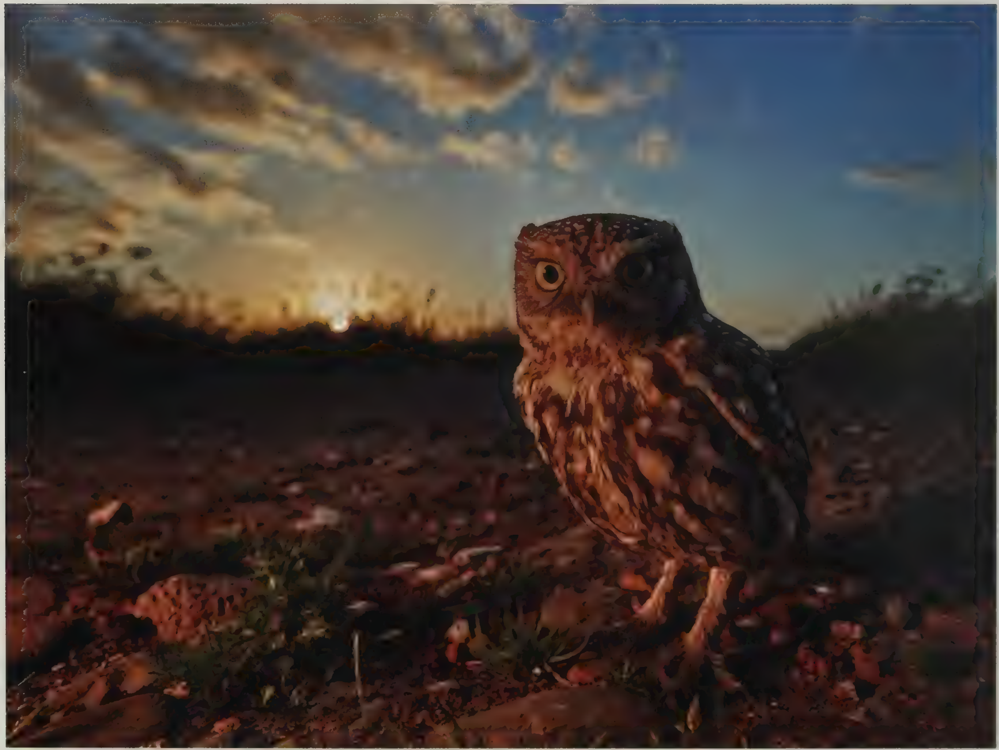
21st November 2015, a northerly gale was blowing and Graham was ensconced in a sea-front shelter at Sutton on Sea, in Lincolnshire, with two companions. A small passage of Little Auks *Alle alle* and waterfowl was apparent but the size of the waves made it difficult to pick up the passing birds. 'While I was scanning for seabirds and ducks, the day was further enhanced by the arrival of two Short-eared Owls that were being blasted southward as they battled in off the sea through the mountainous waves. Picking up another Short-eared Owl well out to sea, I grabbed the camera and took three images of the owl as it flew in, backed by a huge wave. There was no time to move and exclude the fence posts in front of the shelter so the image was cropped to remove these from the shot. The owl was clearly going to be very small in the frame but it showed the fragility of this migrant over the unforgiving sea with the massive waves threatening to swamp the bird as it headed for the safety of the beach.'

Mark Hamblin took third place this year with his stunning portrait of a Common Raven *Corvus corax* against a backdrop of snow-covered mountains in Glen Coe, Argyll, in November 2015 (plate 252). On a bright day in late autumn, Mark has managed to capture the feather detail that is so often lost when exposing an entirely black bird against a paler background, especially when lighting is affected by reflections from snow. 'With the weather set fair, we decided to climb one of the peaks with the hope of some great views and the possibility of some wintry landscape photographs. On reaching the summit, we were greeted by a very approachable Raven that was hanging around in the hope of some leftovers from walkers taking their lunch near the summit cairn. He was very brazen and apparently completely fearless of humans – something I had certainly never experienced previously. I had no intention or hope of photographing wildlife as I only had a 24–105 mm lens with me, but this proved to be ideal for photographing this Raven against the background of the snow-covered mountains. As walkers came and went, he strutted around, picking up titbits and providing plenty of entertainment. After I had spent about an hour photographing him from every



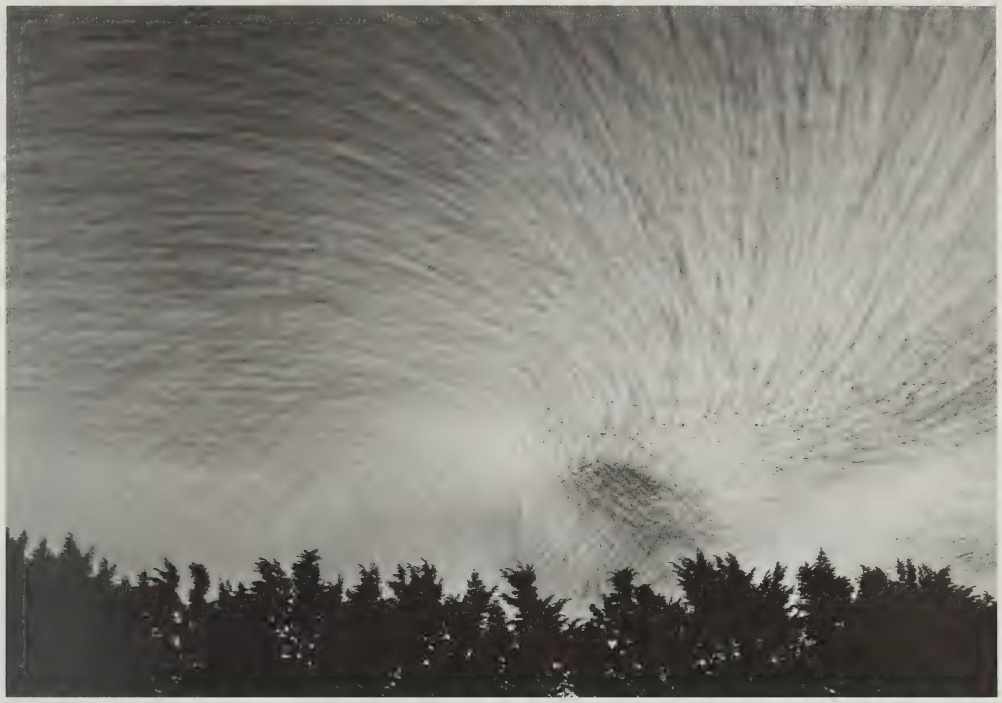
Helen Brassington

254. Fifth Puffins *Fratercula arctica*, Farne Islands, Northumberland, June 2015. (Nikon D7100, Nikkor 300 mm f2.8 AF-S + Nikon 1.4 TC-14E convertor; 1/400, f8, ISO 400.)



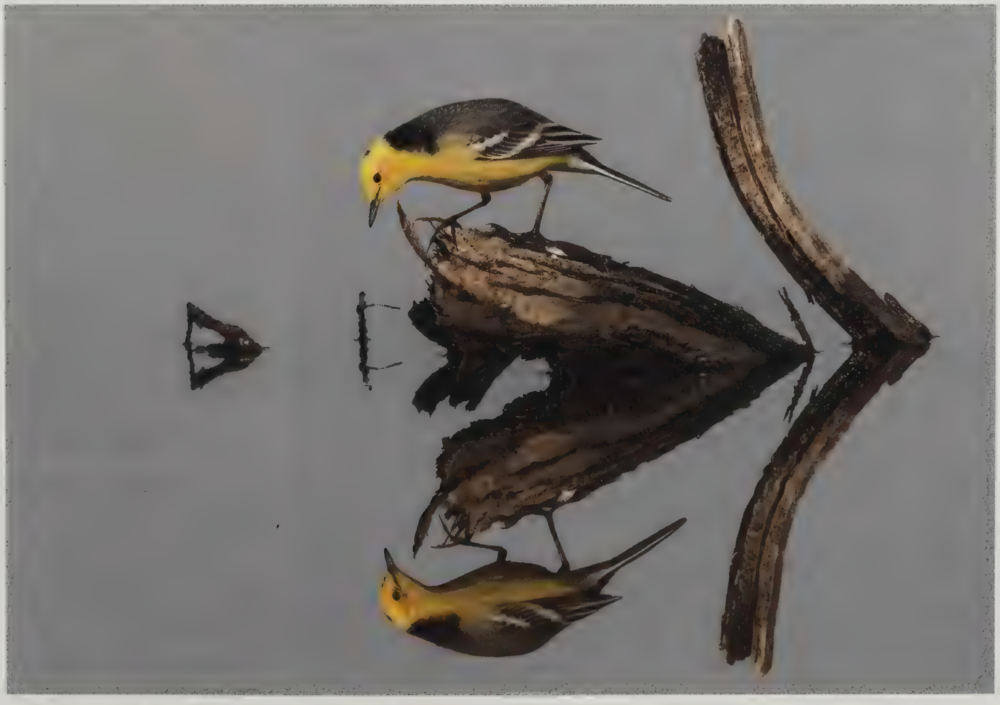
Austin Thomas

255. Sixth Little Owl *Athene noctua*, Lancashire, June 2015. (Canon EOS 1DX, Canon 16–35 mm f2.8 zoom @ 16 mm; 1/3200, f8, ISO 800.)



Oliver Smart

256. Seventh= Common Starlings *Sturnus vulgaris*, Weston-Super-Mare, Somerset, January 2015. (Canon EOS 1DX, Canon 16–35 mm f2.8 Mk 2 zoom @ 23mm; 1/2, f11, ISO 800.)



George Reszeter

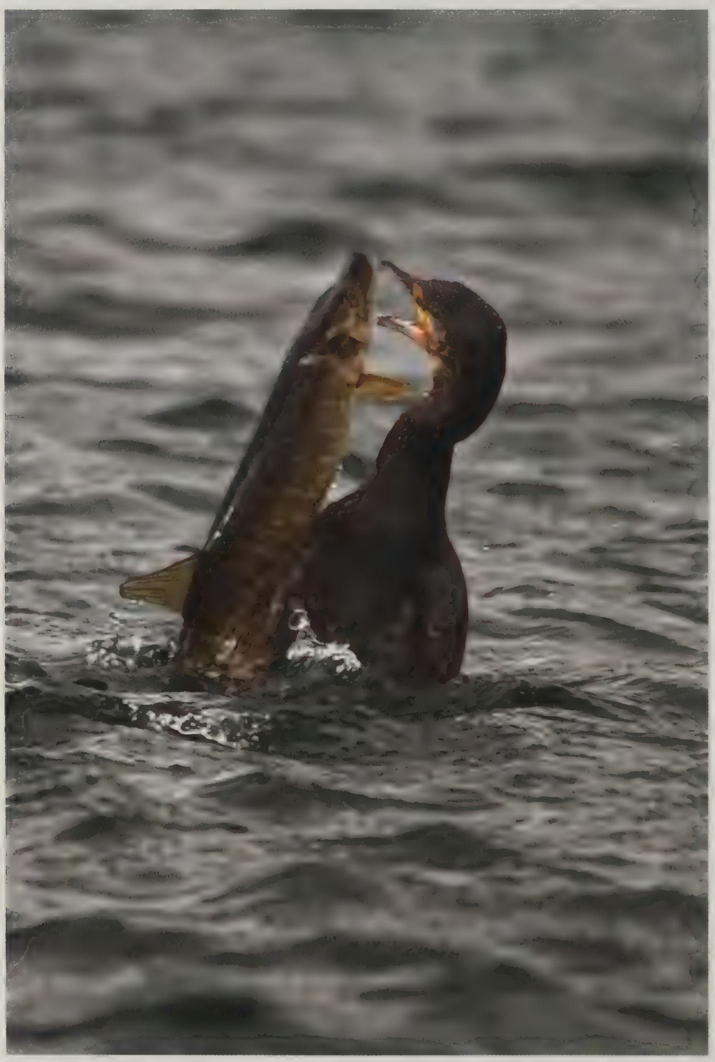
257. Seventh= Citrine Wagtail *Motacilla citreola*, between Akrotiri and Phasouri, Cyprus, March 2015. (Canon EOS 7D Mk 2, Canon 500 mm f4 + Canon 1.4 Mk 2 convertor; 1/2000, f8, ISO 400.)

angle, he hopped onto the summit cairn, honked loudly then flew off to rejoin his more timid mate a few hundred metres away. Sometimes in life you just get lucky and this is what happened on this occasion.'

The Golden Eagle *Aquila chrysaetos* is one of Scotland's most iconic species and sought out by so many visitors, but few will ever be able to match the views that Robert Snell enjoyed on Mull, also in Argyll, in February 2016. Golden Eagles have a large home range, which makes observing their behaviour and photography of it a long and patient process. Golden Eagles will nest-build nearly all the year round, but this reaches a peak in late winter, when they gather up anything from twigs and branches to grasses and heather. On this occasion Robert noticed a male Golden Eagle coming ever closer, intent on collecting nest material. Robert was well hidden and the eagle didn't see him, but it was a tense, fleeting few seconds as it glided down and grasped a large chunk of grasses in its talons (plate 253). Although we receive many photographs of Golden Eagles for this competition, most are taken at feeding stations and lured to bait, so it was refreshing to see a portrait of the species that required much more in the way of field effort.

Helen Brassington's portrait of a Puffin *Fratercula arctica* trio on the Farne Islands, in Northumberland, in June 2015 was placed fifth (plate 254). The judges felt that these three birds looked so comical, seemingly gossiping about the price of fish and the best place to get it. The image is a perfect memento of Helen's visit to the islands for her annual Puffin fix. Very little image processing has been applied: the original was cropped slightly to centre the birds better, with limited sharpening, brightening and a touch of colour added.

Austin Thomas's sixth-placed image is a delightful portrait of a Little Owl *Athene noctua* taken against the setting sun (plate 255). In contrast to the previous entries, which were largely the product of circumstance and being in the right place at the right time, this one was captured as a consequence of the photographer spending considerable time and effort in getting to know

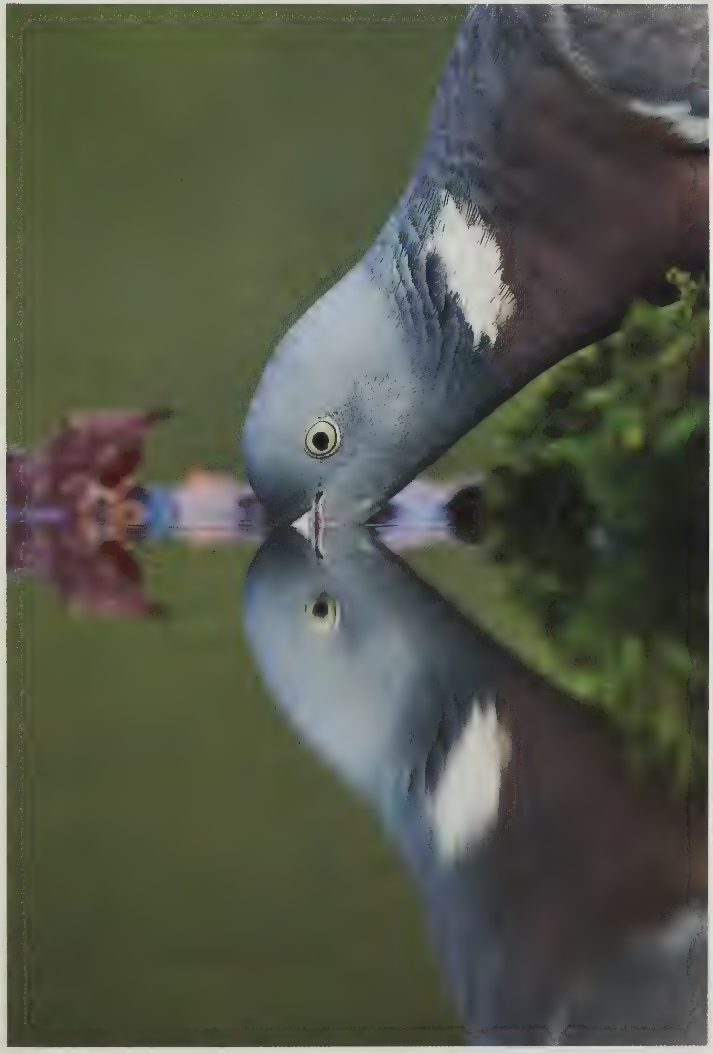

Tony Clarke

258. Ninth Great Cormorant *Phalacrocorax carbo*, Chesterfield, Derbyshire, April 2015. (Canon EOS 7D, Sigma 150–500 mm zoom; 1/1600, f6.3, ISO 400.)

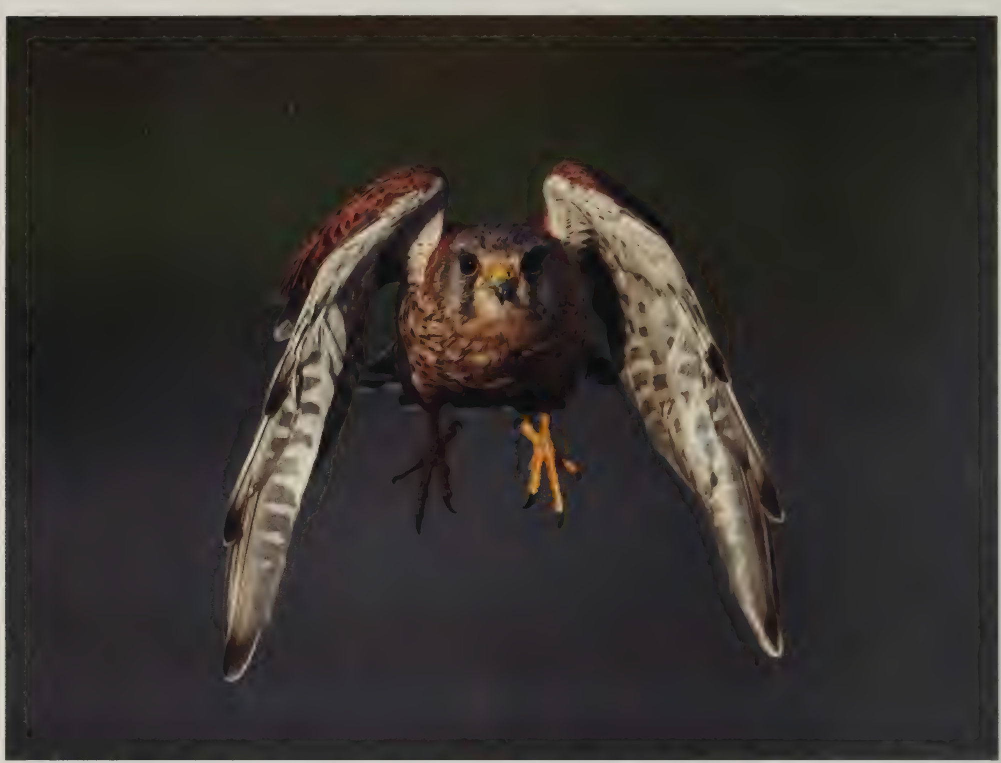
a family of Little Owls in Lancashire, over which time they became comfortable and relaxed in his company. This provided a wonderful opportunity to experiment with situations and lighting that would not be possible without considerable planning. In this case, Austin occasionally provided small pieces of meat to encourage an owl to move towards a pre-focused, tripod-mounted camera fixed to a plate on the ground. Once the owl was close to the camera, he released the shutter remotely, using a radio trigger, which also fired fill-in flash to the left of the camera, adding the warm light cast onto the bird.

In January 2015, hundreds of thousands of Common Starlings *Sturnus vulgaris* made an amazing spectacle each evening in the skies above a small industrial complex in Weston-Super-Mare, in Somerset. Starlings gathering to roost generate abundant opportunities for photographers to show their skills but when we saw Oliver Smart's take on the spectacle we were particularly impressed (plate 256). He decided that the best way to create the impression of movement would be to use a slow shutter speed when photographing this enormous flock as the birds returned to their roost in a single line of trees with the sun setting fast. The conversion of the image to black and white during processing emphasises the swirling patterns of the Starlings as they descend into the trees. Sadly, his story does not have a happy ending: the volume of droppings left by the birds on property and vehicles in the vicinity meant that the trees were felled, and the Starlings forced to relocate.

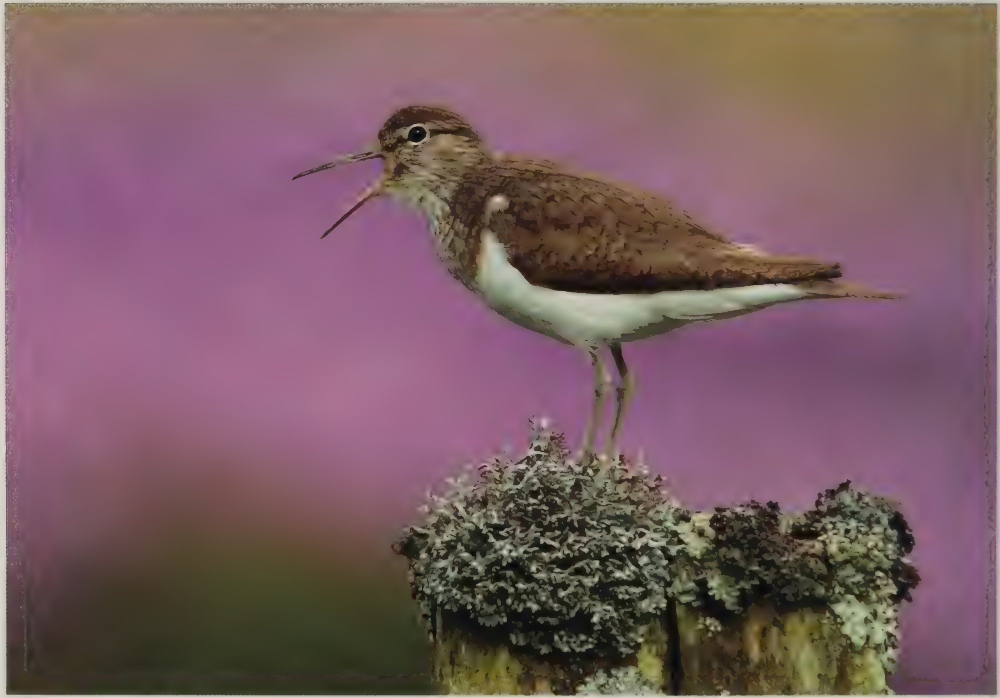
Tied with Oliver Smart's Starlings in equal seventh is an image of a stunning Citrine Wagtail *Motacilla citreola* and its reflection, photographed by George Reszeter in Cyprus in March 2015 (plate 257). George describes this particular morning as a photographer's dream, with beautiful light, no heat haze and no wind, which made the water surface like a mirror. Edging his car into position close to the water's edge and, with the sun behind him, he waited for the birds to come within range of his Canon 500 mm lens balanced on a bean bag on the open window. This Citrine Wagtail was one of the main highlights of


Gary Spicer

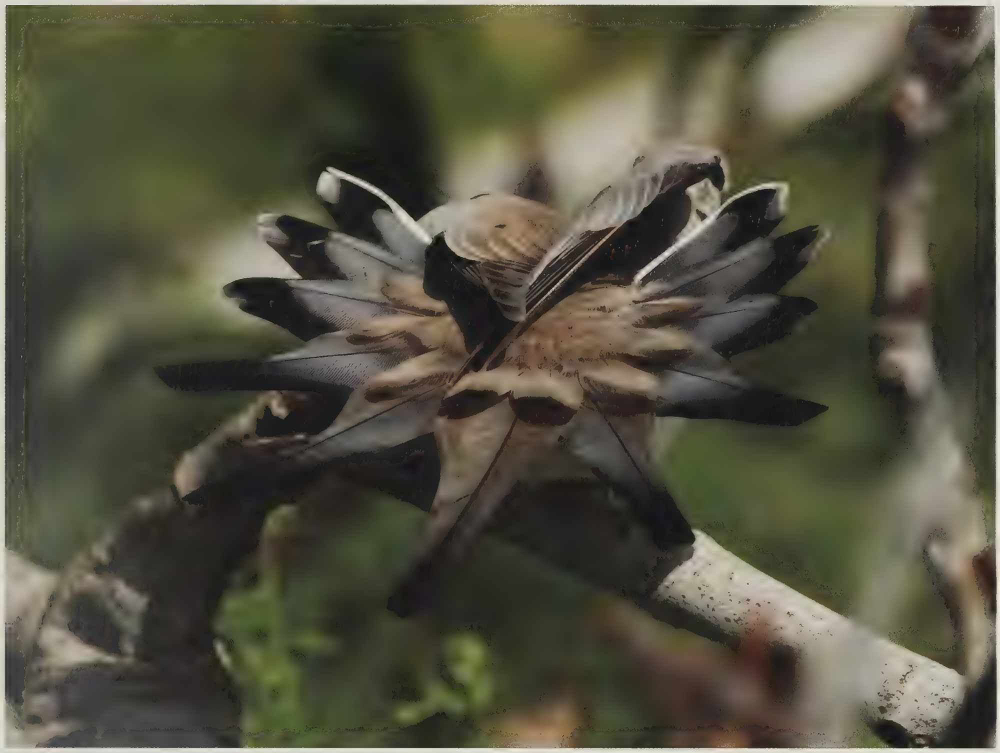
259. Tenth Wood Pigeon *Columba palumbus*, Chilmark, Wiltshire, January 2016. (Canon EOS 1DX, Canon 600 mm f4 Mk 2; 1/250, f5.6, ISO 800.)



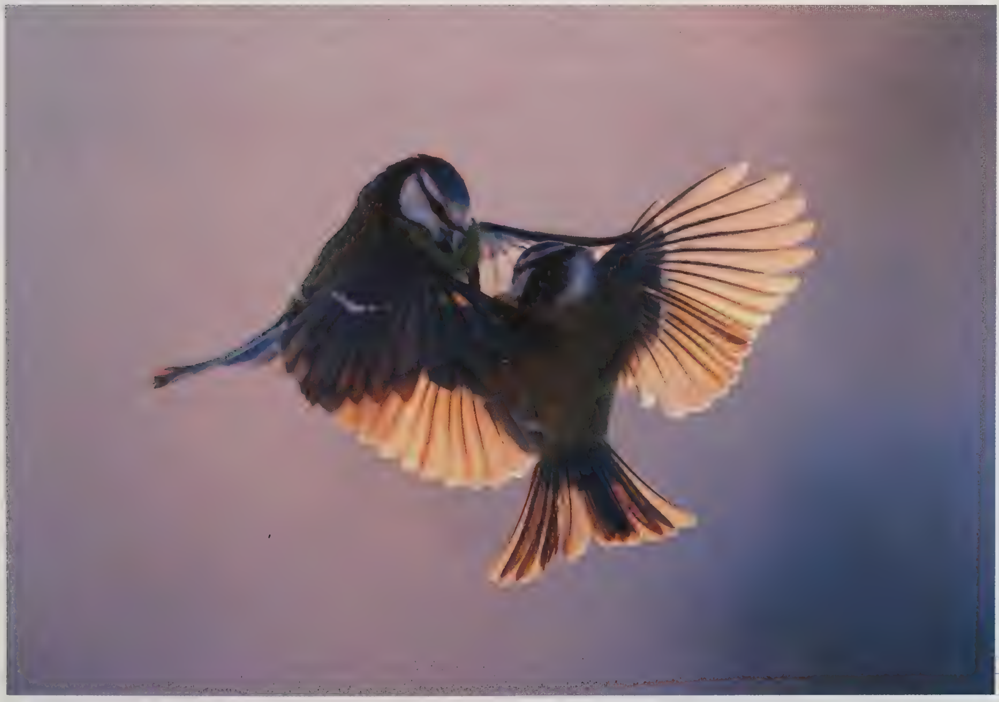
260. Eleventh Common Kestrel *Falco tinnunculus*, Lancashire, September 2015. (Canon EOS 1DX, Canon 800 mm f5.6; 1/3200, f5.6, ISO 1250.)



261. Twelfth Common Sandpiper *Actitis hypoleucos*, Walshaw Dean Reservoir, Yorkshire, June 2015. (Nikon D7000, Sigma 300 mm f2.8 + 1.4 convertor; 1/640, f6.7, ISO 320.)


George Reszeter

262. Thirteenth Namaqua Dove *Oena capensis*, Mandria, Cyprus, March 2016. (Canon EOS 7D Mk 2, Canon 500 mm f4 + Canon 1.4 Mk 2 convertor; 1/2000, f7, ISO 400.)


Arto Juvonen

263. Fourteenth Blue Tits *Cyanistes caeruleus*, Loviisa, Finland, January 2015. (Canon EOS 1DX, Canon 600 mm f4; 1/3200, f5.6, ISO 4000.)

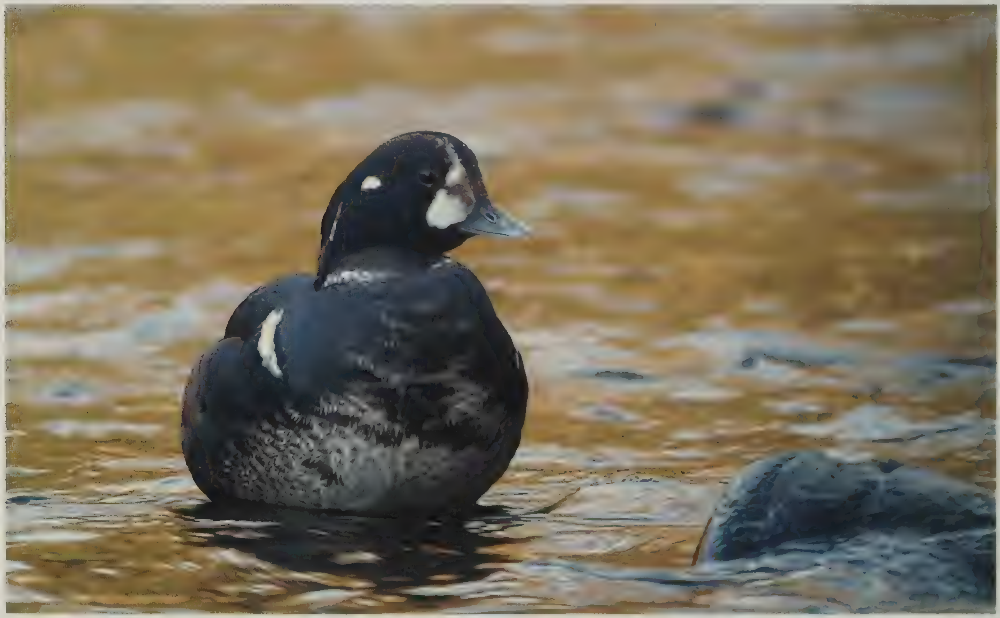
that morning. Ruefully, George noted that a few minutes after he photographed the wagtail, three other cars pulled up beside him and that was the end of the session.

Cormorants are well known for their ability to swallow seemingly impossibly large fish but Tony Clarke's photograph of a Great Cormorant *Phalacrocorax carbo* emerging from the water with a Pike *Esox lucius* almost its own size borders on the foolhardy (plate 258). Tony commented that this particular Cormorant arrived on a village fishing pond in Chesterfield, Derbyshire, in April 2015 to a very mixed reception from the local fishermen! Having watched it take a few small fish, Tony positioned himself as close as he could to where the Cormorant appeared to be having the most success, and eventually it appeared on the surface with this monster Pike in its bill. Tony focused on the bird and watched it holding the fish flat on the surface for several seconds, as it struggled to maintain its grip. It then flipped the fish upwards to get it into a position to swallow and at this point he held down the shutter to catch the action. This image shows the Pike in mid-air just before the Cormorant managed a firmer grip.

The use of 'mirror pools' is becoming an increasingly popular technique for photographers to capture birds in an atmospheric setting and in perfect lighting. In January 2016, Gary Spicer waited for this Wood Pigeon *Columba palumbus* to come down to drink in front of his hide near Chilmark, in Wiltshire (plate 259). Although the photograph is tightly cropped, in this instance the cropping enhances the symmetry of the picture and adds to the overall appeal of this tenth-placed image.

Austin Thomas appears in the final shortlist for a second time with his 11th-placed image of a Common Kestrel taken on farmland in Lancashire in September 2015 (plate 260). As with his Little Owl, Austin worked with this Kestrel over a period of several months, feeding it on small pieces of chopped meat. Nonetheless, it never became particularly approachable, so to obtain the low perspective seen in this image he used his 800 mm lens mounted on a tripod head and fixed to a plate on the ground. Austin himself was out of sight of the bird when this image was taken, again using a remote shutter release.

In 12th place is a delightful portrait of a Common Sandpiper *Actitis hypoleucos* by Gary Waddington. Gary came across this bird while walking along the footpath at Walshaw Dean Reservoir, Yorkshire, in June 2015, and fully expected the bird to fly off as he got


Kris Gibb

264. Digiscoping winner Harlequin Duck *Histrionicus histrionicus*, River Don, Aberdeen, March 2015. (Samsung Galaxy Alpha, Swarovski ATX 95 (30x–70x) telescope; 1/33, f2.2, ISO 50.)

closer. Instead it remained, and on a particularly attractive lichen-covered post; to further enhance the result, Gary was able to position himself to get the flowering rhododendron bushes in the background (plate 261)

It took a while for the judging panel to work out what this bird in plate 262 was and what it was doing! For those still struggling to work it out, it is a Namaqua Dove *Oena capensis* stretching and fanning its tail. It's a view of this species that the judges had never seen before, and in 13th place it becomes George Reszeter's second image in the 2016 final shortlist.

No such recognition problems beset the pair of squabbling Blue Tits *Cyanistes caeruleus* taken by Arto Juvonen at his feeding station in a Finnish woodland on a chilly January afternoon, and placed 14th (plate 263). When days are really cold, ice crystals in the air accentuate the reddish tones of the setting sun, and this effect is further enhanced by the use of reflected light to illuminate the shaded side of the birds, all of which provides a wonderful backdrop to a couple of familiar birds.

Digiscoping

Last year we commented on the popularity of 'phonescoping' for obtaining record shots, and how this has grown in popularity as camera sensor quality has increased. In our digiscoping award this year, the move away from dedicated cameras to the use of the camera in mobile phones was even more apparent. This year both the winner and the runner-up in this competition used mobile phone cameras.

The 2016 Eric Hosking Charitable Trust Award for the best digiscoped photograph goes to Kris Gibb for his beautiful portrait of the young male Harlequin Duck *Histrionicus histrionicus* that frequented the River Don in Aberdeen for several months over the 2014/15 winter (plate 264). This proved to be one of the most popular long-staying rarities in 2015 and became a focus of Kris's digiscoping efforts. On his second visit he was treated to breathtaking, close-range views of the bird. Under the trees the light was less than perfect but the combination of the warm tones of the water and the position of the rock nicely complements the Harlequin. The image, taken with a Samsung Galaxy Alpha phone and a Swarovski ATX 95, is impressively sharp, while the subtle blue-grey colour tones of the bird are seemingly also captured to perfection. The use of a smartphone for digiscoping is becoming increasingly widespread, which has the added benefit of faster upload to social media. Phonescoping can be a bit hit-and-miss at times, but in this case it was spot-on. Are we seeing the beginning of the end of the dedicated camera for digiscoping?

Acknowledgments

We are immensely grateful to all our sponsors – without them *BB* would not be able to host this competition – and look forward to working together again in the future. We also thank the BTO for allowing us to use the Nunnery in Thetford for the judging, in particular Dawn Balmer for organising a room and providing refreshments.

Richard Chandler, Tim Appleton, Robin Chittenden, David Hosking, Peter Kennerley,
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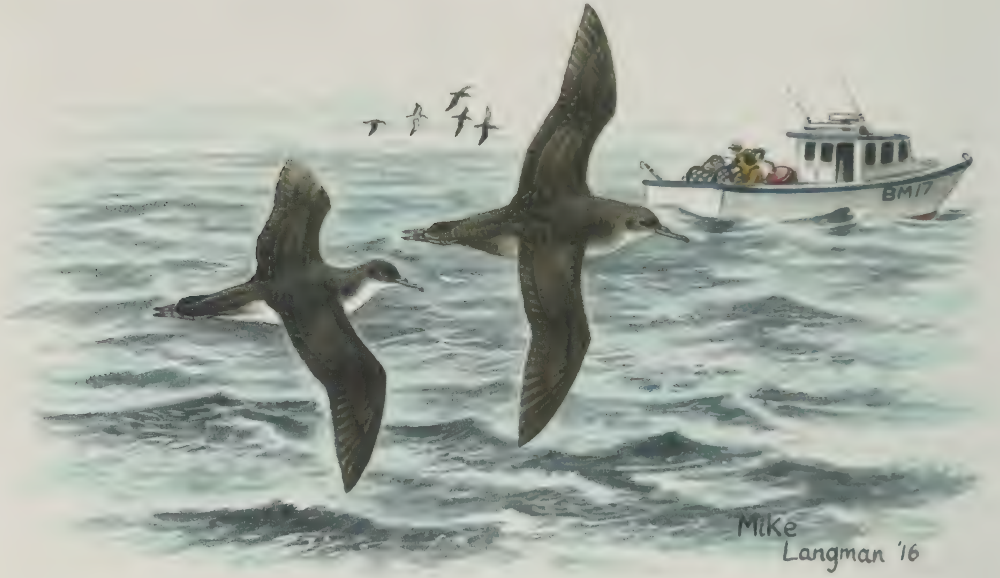
Yelkouan Shearwater in Devon: new to Britain

Mark Darlaston and Mike Langman



Mike Langman

Yelkouan Shearwater *Puffinus yelkouan* with Balearic Shearwater *P. mauretanicus*.

Abstract A Yelkouan Shearwater *Puffinus yelkouan* seen off Berry Head, Devon, on 29th July 2008 has been accepted by BOURC as the first for Britain. The bird was seen in direct comparison with a Balearic Shearwater *P. mauretanicus*, both in flight and at rest on the sea, and lingered long enough for detailed field notes and a series of photographs to be taken. This account describes the circumstances of the record and the identification process.

Berry Head, in Devon, is one of our favourite seawatch points. Owing to its position, jutting out into the western side of Lyme Bay, it provides some of the best seawatching in Devon, if not the UK, and is particularly good for Balearic Shearwater *Puffinus mauretanicus* passage. Over many years of watching Berry Head (amounting to several thousand hours of experience between us at the time of the observation), we feel a comforting familiarity with the site: the ever-changing light conditions, the effect that weather has on the behaviour and jizz of particular seabirds, the acknowledgment of each other's abilities and, of course, an eye to a promising forecast.

The weather reports for Tuesday 29th July 2008 were promising, and both of us duly made our way to Berry Head that morning. Frustratingly, however, the strong winds and rain predicted the previous evening had not materialised. ML had arrived at around 05.30 hrs and MD at around 08.30 hrs, by which time the wind had freshened slightly, to a SSW force 4, with increasing cloud and occasional showers (fig. 1). However, shearwater passage was relatively light throughout the watch and, by 14.30 hrs, the final totals were modest by Berry Head standards: 16 Balearic, 110 Manx *P. puffinus* and a single Sooty

Shearwater *P. griseus*. (Early the following morning, 102 Cory's Shearwaters *Calonectris borealis* – a site record – and three Great Shearwaters *P. gravis* passed the headland, showing that the system had collected other species!)

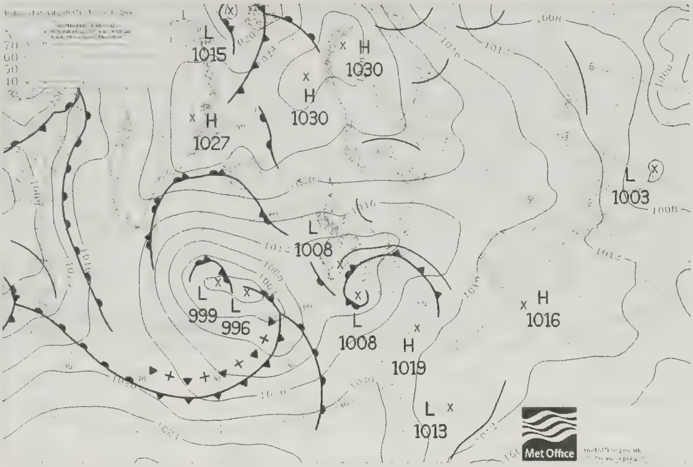
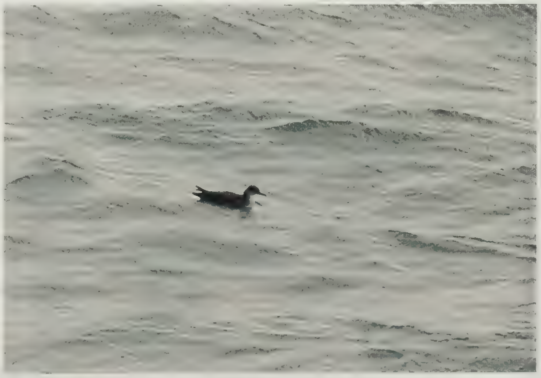


Fig. 1. North Atlantic pressure chart for 00.00 hrs on 29th July 2008.

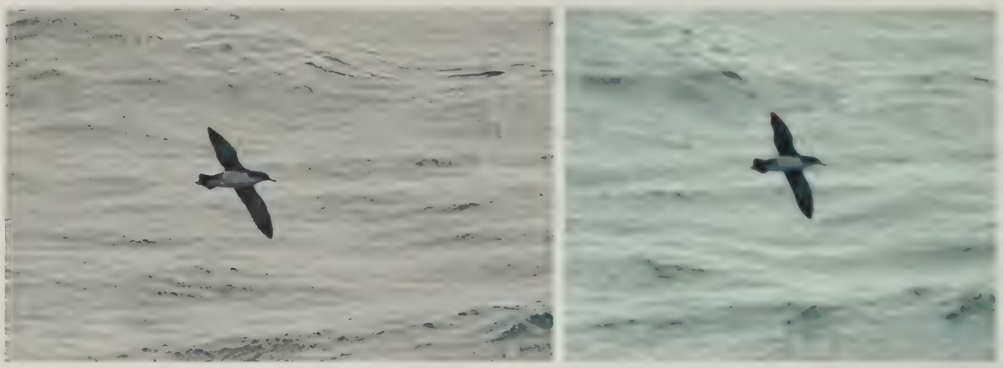
At about 08.50 hrs on 29th, MD called out a close 'Manx' heading in towards us, picked up initially with 12×50 binoculars. ML got onto the bird immediately with his binoculars and, seeing a 'black-and-white' shearwater, concurred with this identification. At that time, the light was quite harsh, as a result of a thinly veiled sun – quite typical on the south Devon coast unless there is thick cloud cover – and this has a dramatic effect on the perception of plumage tones during morning seawatching. The bird then banked in towards us and headed for a small, crab-fishing boat; this was unexpected, since Manx Shearwaters rarely come to passing trawlers, let alone crabbers. Balearic Shearwaters will, however, often make a beeline for an active fishing vessel, particularly one with an aggregation of other seabirds behind, and this is a regular sight for us, since the site is close to the fishing port of Brixham.

ML got the shearwater in his scope as it landed behind the crabber, some 150 m or so from our vantage point, and suggested that it must be a pale 'Balearic' based on its behaviour. We both reached for our cameras without scrutinising the bird further as, in seawatching terms, the shearwater was fairly close in. We each took a few pictures of the bird on the water (plate 265), then waited several minutes for it to fly, hoping we might get some good flight shots of what we assumed was indeed a 'pale Balearic'. That day, we both had new cameras to field-test: ML a Lumix bridge camera and MD a Nikon DLSR, the latter acquired the previous day and used for the first time that morning (so he was still working out the best camera settings to use). Eventually, the bird flew and we took some shots of it as it headed south at close range and finally disappeared around the headland. As it turned out, our best shots were very similar (plates 266 & 267). And as we compared the differences between the cameras and zoomed in on the images, we became alarmed at how pale the bird was, in particular the amount of white extending down between the legs, which was shown better in MD's DSLR images (plate 266). ML jokingly commented: 'You know, we might have just photographed Britain's first Yelkouan Shearwater there!' But the bird had gone and we hadn't really looked very hard at it; we were being photographers (with new toys) and not observers! We continued seawatching and put the incident behind us, although we both had in our minds the point later in the day when we could examine the images properly, on a computer screen.



Mark Darlaston

265. Yelkouan Shearwater *Puffinus yelkouan*, Berry Head, Devon, 29th July 2008; the bird looks quite like a Manx Shearwater *P. puffinus* in this shot.

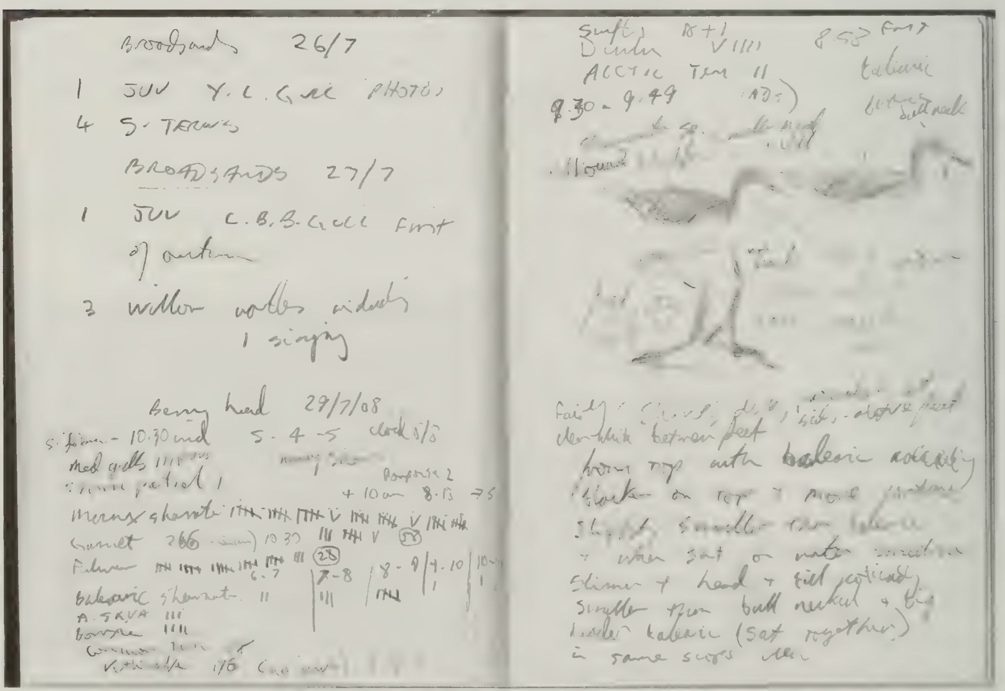


Mark Darlaston

Mike Langman

266 & 267. Underside view of Yelkouan Shearwater *Puffinus yelkouan*, Berry Head, Devon, 29th July 2008, showing extent of white throughout the body and wings (note particularly the white rear end to the body, with white feathering extending between the legs).

At about 09.30 hrs, a Balearic Shearwater appeared, heading north (which is unusual – nearly all birds head south at Berry Head), and was closely followed by a bird that again we both initially called 'Manx'. To start with, we concentrated on the Balearic (as we had been noting the extent of wing moult in this species), but as it came in and landed behind the same crabber, it was joined by the 'Manx', and alarm bells began to ring. The second bird was obviously *not* a Manx! The light was now better, with increasing cloud cover neutralising any glare. ML quickly switched from a 32× eyepiece to a more powerful 50× eyepiece as the birds were more distant (about 250 m+). It was surely the same bird we had seen and photographed 40 minutes earlier, showing the same striking contrast between the blackish upperparts and white throat, neck and chest. The bird lacked the white rear crescent to the ear-coverts of Manx and showed greyish fore-flanks and breast-sides, just behind the darker shoulder smudge. It was also noticeably smaller and more delicate than the Balearic sitting alongside it. At this point, we were both excitedly describing out


Broadsands 26/7
1 JUV Y.L.GULL PHOTO
4 S. TERNS
BROADSANDS 27/7
1 JUV G.B.B.GULL First of autumn
3 willow warbler
1 singing
Berry head 29/7/08
5 - 4 - 5
Porpoise 2
+ 10 am 8.13
Manx shearwater
Gannet 10 30
28
Balearic shearwater
A. SKUA
ARCTIC TERN
9.30 - 9.49
8.58
Balearic
between feet
Balearic
slightly smaller than Balearic
+ when sat on water
slimmer + head + bill
smaller than bull necked + big headed Balearic (sat together)
in same scope view

Mike Langman

Fig. 2. Field sketches of the Berry Head Yelkouan Shearwater *Puffinus yelkouan* (compared with Balearic Shearwater *P. mauretanicus* sat on the water), made on site, 29th July 2008.

loud what we were seeing, and ML said: 'If I had seen this bird in the eastern Med, it would be Yelkouan Shearwater!' Knowing that the bird was beyond the range to get anything useful with his camera, ML started to make quick but precise field sketches and notes as he viewed the bird at 50× magnification (figs. 2 & 3). The two birds stayed together for some time, occasionally flying around and then landing again on the water. Meanwhile, MD made notes based on views through a 30× telescope, but also added a 1.4× converter to his Nikon 300 mm f4 lens, hoping for more comparison shots of the two shearwaters. The best of these were obtained when the birds departed together 15 minutes or so later, at around 09.45 hrs. Although distant, these photos do capture the size and structural differences that we were seeing between the two birds in flight through our telescopes (see plates 268 & 269). With the combination of our notes and photos, and ML's sketches, we felt that we had a genuine claim of the first Yelkouan Shearwater for Britain.

Over the years, we have both seen tens of thousands of Manx and thousands of Balearic Shearwaters, but only ML had first-hand experience of Yelkouan, from the eastern Mediterranean and Black Sea. Quite by chance, just a few days before the sighting, ML had posted some of his field sketches from Bulgaria on his website, at www.mikelangman.co.uk/mike_langmanFieldSketch.htm

Description

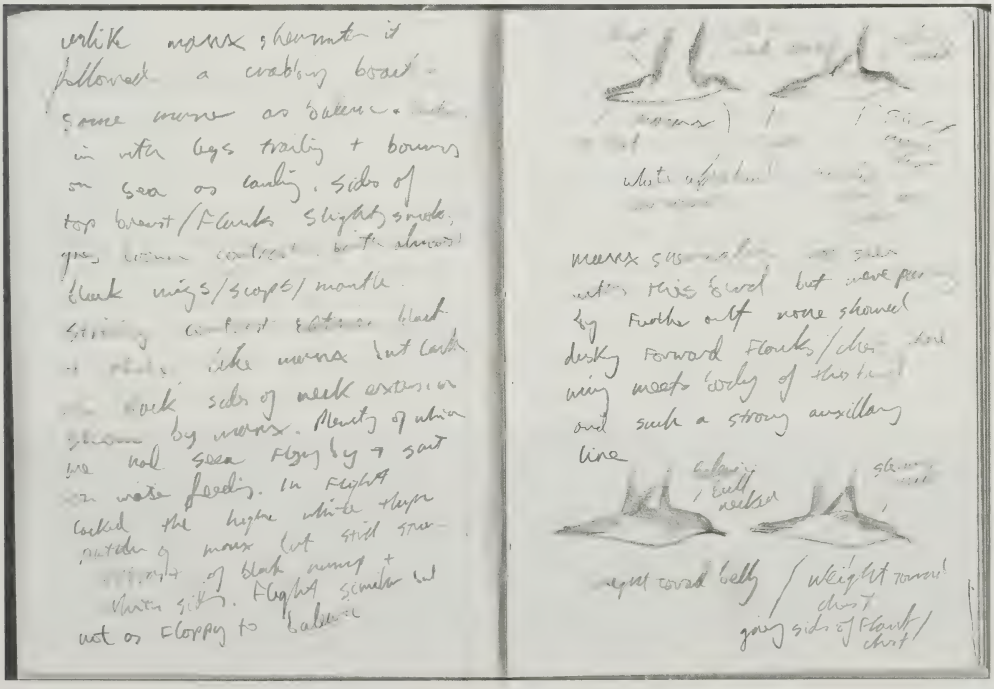
Size

Smaller than Balearic, about same size as Manx Shearwater and similar to the latter in structure; it lacked the bulkiness of Balearic Shearwater, particularly around the rear body, belly, head, neck and bill.

Shape and flight

In direct comparison, on the water, it was slighter than Balearic Shearwater, with a smaller, more rounded head, a steeper forehead, a thinner, more delicate neck and a slimmer bill.

In flight, the body shape was different from both Balearic and Manx Shearwaters. Compared with Balearic it was slimmer, especially around the lower belly and rear end, with the heaviest part of the underside being further forward than in Balearic and nearer the chest. The upper neck was also

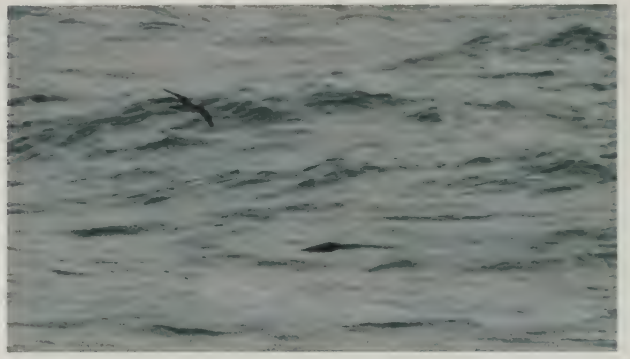


unlike manx shearwater it
followed a crabbing boat
same manner as balearic [illegible]
in with legs trailing + bouncing
on sea as landing. sides of
top breast/flanks slightly smoky
grey [illegible] contrast [illegible] but showed
black wings/scaps/mantle
[illegible] [illegible] [illegible] black
[illegible] like manx but lacks
[illegible] dark sides of neck extension
[illegible] by manx. plenty of which
we had seen flying by + sat
on water feeding. In flight
looked the higher white shape
pattern of manx but still strong
[illegible] of black rump +
white sides. Flight similar but
not as floppy as balearic

manx sh[illegible] [illegible]
with this bird but were few
by further out none showed
dusky forward flanks/chest [illegible]
wing meets body of this bird
and such a strong auxillary
line

Fig. 3. Field sketches of the Berry Head Yelkouan Shearwater *Puffinus yelkouan* (compared with Manx *P. puffinus* and Balearic Shearwater *P. mauretanicus* in flight), made on site, 29th July 2008.

Mike Langman


Mark Darlaston

268. Yelkouan Shearwater *Puffinus yelkouan* (top), Berry Head, Devon, 29th July 2008. The Yelkouan shows a slimmer structure and more contrasting appearance compared with the accompanying Balearic Shearwater *P. mauretanicus*.

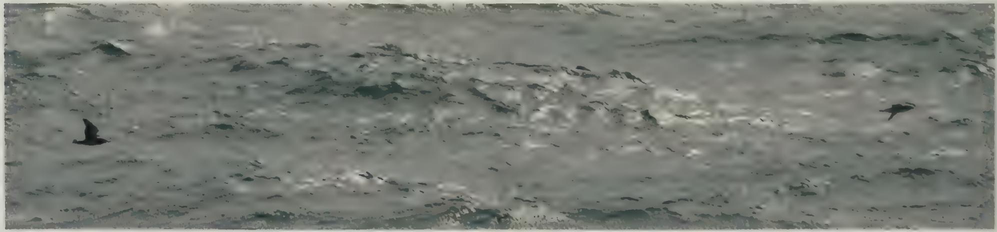
thinner than in Balearic, which usually looks quite bull-necked (see figs. 2 & 3). The photographs also show the wing shape to differ from that of Manx, being more rounded at the wing-tip (plate 266). Importantly, the feet trailed beyond the tail in flight at all times. We have seen this in Manx but generally only after they take off or if a bird is considering landing (see Darlaston & Langman 2016). One thing we didn't note in our descriptions at the time was the attenuated look of the rear end, caused by the slim tapering body ending with projecting feet – an effect not seen in Manx and Balearic. Yet this is quite apparent in plates 268 & 269 in direct comparison with the flying Balearic.

The flight was somewhere between Manx and Balearic, closest to Balearic in being quite 'flappy', but more buoyant and not too dissimilar to Manx – which fitted well with ML's experience and knowledge of Yelkouan Shearwater from the eastern Mediterranean and Black Sea. The bird raised its head during flight several times (plate 270) – a feature of Yelkouan mentioned by Garner (2008) – but we have seen Balearic do this occasionally (including a very pale Balearic MD saw on 18th August 2008), although perhaps not as regularly as Yelkouan Shearwater does.

Plumage

A very neat, black-and-white shearwater. The upperparts were a clean blackish-brown, closer to but still different from the bluish-black of Manx, or the earthy brown of Balearic. The white on the lower face was pure and clean under the dark ear-coverts and did not arc behind the ear-coverts to show the white crescent seen on Manx, a feature mentioned by McGeehan (1997). The demarcation between the blackish upper head and back of neck appeared clean, like a Manx, and not smudgy or sullied like a Balearic, and the sharp contrast between the upperparts and underparts continued along the sides of the lower breast and along the flanks. The wings were drooped more than in a normal resting bird, presumably as it was ready to dive at any time, so the flanks of the resting bird were not seen easily. The upper flanks just behind the blackish shoulder smudges were greyish (see fig. 3).

In flight, the true extent of the white underparts became clear; the bird looked remarkably Manx-like, virtually all of the lower body being clean white, extending between and beyond the legs. There was some greyish smudging on the upper fore-flanks. However, it was not as extensive as is suggested in the photographs; we are sure this is due to shadowing caused by the wings, as these first photographs were taken into bright light. This would hold true as the strong demarcation between white and dark


Mark Darlaston

269. Yelkouan Shearwater *Puffinus yelkouan* (right), Berry Head, Devon, 29th July 2008. The Yelkouan shows a slimmer profile and more attenuated rear end compared with the more thickset Balearic Shearwater *P. mauretanicus* (left).

on the face is not as apparent in the photos, while the thin and clean axillary line appears smudgy in the photos. Some photo manipulation was needed to extract the detail in plates 265–267; indeed, the harsh light was one reason that we let the bird go initially without paying enough attention.

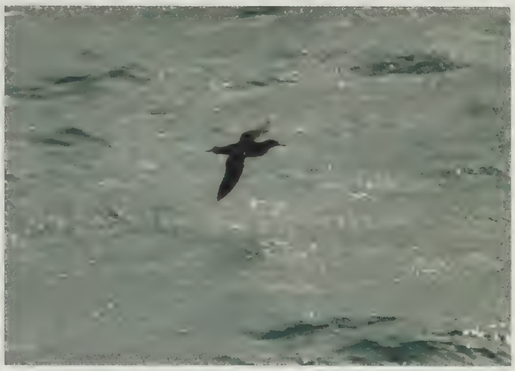
Luckily we got a second bite when it reappeared, although the light was relatively harsh when plate 269 was taken. The underwings were nearly as white as in Manx, but lacked the strong contrast between the white coverts and black remiges of that species: the trailing edge of the wing was greyer. The axillaries showed a neat black diagonal line, less smudgy and less extensive than on Balearic, more similar to that shown by several Manx that we have seen. The upperwings were uniform blackish-brown, darker than and not as brown as Balearic, similar to Manx but not quite as black. The rear body showed contrast between the white, extending in a 'V'-shaped wedge between the legs down to the tail, and darker plumage confined to the side of the legs and upper thighs. It thus lacked the high white thigh that extends almost onto the sides of the rump of Manx and the dirty rear end of Balearic Shearwater.

Bare parts

Bill black, legs dull fleshy grey with pinkish webbing between the toes.

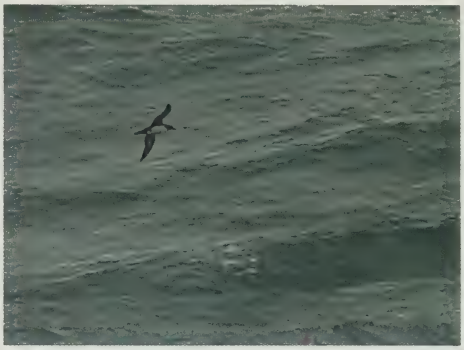
Age

The flight feathers showed no sign of any moult and appeared pristine (plates 266 & 270), which might suggest that the bird was a juvenile, since adults should be in active wing moult in late July, or at least show bleached, and browner, more mottled upperpart coloration. However, we are unaware of any published data regarding the moult sequence of first-summer or non-breeding Yelkouan Shearwater.



Mike Langman

270. Yelkouan Shearwater *Puffinus yelkouan*, Berry Head, Devon, 29th July 2008, showing characteristic head-lifting jizz.



Mark Darlaston

271. An extremely pale Balearic Shearwater *Puffinus mauretanicus*, Berry Head, Devon, 30th January 2009. This bird has white on the underparts extending down between the legs. Note the heavier belly and rear body – too thickset for Yelkouan *P. yelkouan* or Manx Shearwater *P. puffinus*.

Discussion

We were very careful to rule out a pale Balearic Shearwater, since we have both encountered many very pale individuals over the years (see plate 271) and believe that these may be claimed as Yelkouan Shearwater by the unwary, especially in difficult light conditions. Yet our bird was structurally quite different from Balearic. If anything, ruling out Manx was far more important, given that both times we saw it our initial reaction was 'Manx', something that we cannot recall happening previously on a relatively close pale Balearic Shearwater. A combination of behavioural, structural and plumage characteristics helped to rule out Manx:

- Readily attending a small boat hauling crab pots (Manx rarely if ever does this).
- Blunter wing shape, slimmer body shape, rear end more attenuated than Manx (from photos).
- Feet always projecting in flight (trailing feet can be seen in Manx but are usually retracted in travelling flight).
- Lack of both the white crescent behind the ear-coverts and the high white 'saddle

bags', both typically shown by Manx.
- Upperpart colour less black than Manx.
- Less contrast in the underwings, with flight feathers greyer, rather than black as in Manx.
- Undertail-coverts more dusky at the sides than Manx.

Although not part of our original submission, plate 265 of the Berry Head bird on the water reveals a subtle capped appearance and slightly greyer nape, which recalls the comparison with Great Shearwater in ML's notes on Bulgarian birds in 2003 and noted subsequently in other resting Yelkouan Shearwaters off Greece. This is not something we have noted in Manx (which shows a uniform black nape) or Balearic (which lacks the contrasting black-and-white face and head).

Since our submission in 2008, a long-awaited paper on the identification of Manx, Yelkouan and Balearic Shearwaters was published in 2015 (Gil-Velasco *et al.* 2015). Reading that, and running through the key features we had described on the Berry Head shearwater against their criteria for Yelkouan Shearwater, we believed that our bird still had a good chance of being accepted.

Gil-Velasco *et al.* mentioned a supplementary feature for separating Manx from Yelkouan that we had not previously considered. The white on the face of Manx extends above the gape line, whereas on Yelkouan it occurs below the gape line only. Coupled with the lack of the white auricular crescent, this gives a different facial expression. This can (just) be seen in plates 265 & 266 of the Berry Head bird. The gape line was not noted in our original submission but appears to be another useful feature.

Taxonomy, population and distribution

Until 1991, the Manx/Balearic/Yelkouan complex was treated as a single species, the Manx Shearwater. Then 'Mediterranean Shearwater' was split from Manx Shearwater (Bourne *et al.* 1988), becoming *P. yelkouan* with races *P. y. yelkouan* and *P. y. mauretanicus*. Ten years on, and 'Mediterranean Shearwater' was split, becoming Yelkouan Shearwater *P. yelkouan* and Balearic Shearwater *P. mauretanicus* (Sangster *et al.* 2002).

Manx Shearwater is the most abundant of the three species with a population of 1,050,000–1,170,000 individuals (status and estimates of population size from BirdLife International 2016). The vast majority breed around the Atlantic coasts of Britain & Ireland and it is our most commonly encountered shearwater. Yelkouan Shearwater has an estimated population of 46,000–92,000 individuals and is categorised as Vulnerable. It breeds to the east of the Balearic Islands (although Menorcan birds add some confusion – see below), and winters in good numbers off the Mediterranean coast of France and in the Aegean and Black Sea. Balearic Shearwater breeds exclusively on the Balearic Islands, has an estimated population of 20,000–30,000 individuals and is considered Critically Endangered. It is undergoing an extremely rapid population decline owing to a number of threats, in particular predation at breeding colonies by introduced mammals and at-sea mortality as a result of fisheries bycatch (BirdLife International 2016). Outside the breeding season, large gatherings off the French coast have resulted in greater use of UK waters (Wynn & Yésou 2007; Wynn 2009; Darlaston & Wynn 2012; Darlaston 2016).

There is also a small population of shearwaters on Menorca, estimated at 100–150 pairs, which includes some individuals which are phenotypically inseparable from Yelkouan Shearwater in the field (Robb *et al.* 2008; Gil-Velasco *et al.* 2015). There is confusion over whether these 'Menorcan shearwaters' belong to *P. mauretanicus* or *P. yelkouan*, as genetically they share affinities with both species (Genovart *et al.* 2012). It is worth noting that, compared with the Yelkouan Shearwater population, these birds are incredibly rare. One theory is that 'Menorcan shearwater' may be the source of 'Yelkouan-type' sightings in Britain but tracking studies have so far not shown them to reach British waters along with Balearic Shearwaters.

Acknowledgments

We would like to thank several people for their thoughts and discussion regarding this record, in particular the late Martin Garner whose reaction on seeing our notes and photographs was so positive, but also Killian Mullarney, Steve Votier and Grahame Walbridge who all provided encouraging feedback.

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Paul French, BBRC Chairman, commented: 'This record was undoubtedly tricky to assess, representing as it does the first national record of this particular shearwater. Thankfully, the submission was a comprehensive one, which enabled BBRC to make a thorough assessment of crucial plumage and structural features, while the observers' vast experience with Manx and Balearic Shearwaters enabled them to convey the subtle differences in jizz between their bird and the two commoner species. Indeed, the submission was of a sufficiently high standard to be shortlisted for this year's Carl Zeiss Award (see pp. 457–462).

'The main reasons for the delay in assessing this record have been the uncertainty surrounding the identification of the shearwaters breeding on Menorca [see below], and as a consequence the identifiability of Yelkouan Shearwater in a vagrant context. BBRC was aware that a paper on the identification of the Manx/Balearic/Yelkouan Shearwater complex (Gil-Velasco *et al.* 2015) had been in preparation for some time, and opted to wait for this to be published, thus ensuring that its decision was based on the most up-to-date criteria. BBRC's approach to potential hybrids will be discussed in a forthcoming paper in *BB*. The likelihood of the Berry Head bird being a hybrid was deemed to be small and the record was duly accepted and passed to BOURC.

'Yelkouan Shearwater will always remain a very difficult species to prove in British waters, as the slow progress of several subsequent claims currently making their way through the BBRC system shows. Observers should be thoroughly familiar with the plumage variability and moults of Manx and Balearic Shearwaters, and how the impact of different light and sea conditions can affect appearance. Ideally, good photographs would certainly help future claims, at least until we are better able to judge how frequently this species occurs in British waters. Nonetheless, submissions without photographs from observers fulfilling the above parameters will also be seriously considered.'

On behalf of BOURC, Martin Collinson commented: 'BOURC members agreed that Yelkouan Shearwater was a potential, even likely, vagrant, but this was a tricky assessment that presented several challenges. Once it came to the attention of BOURC that there were active research projects addressing both the identification criteria and the migration of Yelkouan Shearwaters, it became apparent that there was likely to be a delay before an adequately robust decision on acceptance could be made.

'The "Menorcan shearwater" population has been shown to be almost certainly the result of geographically limited hybridisation between Yelkouan and Balearic Shearwaters (Genovart *et al.* 2012). Although they are genetically mixed, some of them are outwardly indistinguishable from Yelkouan Shearwater. BOURC does not accept known or suspected intergrades or hybrids to the British List. Whereas "Yelkouan-like Menorcan shearwaters" represent only a tiny number of birds in relation to the world population of Yelkouan Shearwaters, the problem faced by BOURC was whether these relatively few birds, which by definition were not acceptable, were likely to perform a Balearic-like migration because of their genetic mix. In this respect, we were extremely grateful for input from Russell Wynn and colleagues from the National Oceanography Centre, who were able to share preliminary geolocator data from tagged birds, which will be published in full elsewhere. Their information informed BOURC's policy to accept a vagrant bird if it showed plumage and structural features of Yelkouan Shearwater with no overtly intermediate characters.

'BOURC also had to be convinced that Yelkouan Shearwaters were robustly distinguishable from the palest Balearic Shearwaters and that the level of documentation illustrated the required identification criteria unambiguously. The paper in *BB* by Gil-Velasco *et al.* (2015) clarified the features important for separation of Yelkouan Shearwaters from pale Balearics. The photographs that accompanied this submission of the Berry Head individual were impressive, given the conditions and distance associated with land-based observation of seabirds. However, they were notably and understandably inferior to the photographs that accompanied a comparably awkward identification – the boat-based observation of Scopoli's Shearwater *Calonectris diomedea* south of the Isles of Scilly in August 2004 (Fisher & Flood 2010). BOURC took a long time to consider whether the photographic evidence presented for the claimed Yelkouan Shearwater was nevertheless good enough to eliminate Balearic Shearwater. It should be stated that the lower-resolution images previously published in the birding press do not do justice to the originals, with particular reference to the exact plumage patterns of, for example, the axillary markings, which corroborated the observers' field sketches and independent description of the critical field marks. In the end, the decision to accept the identification was based on the original images, field notes and sketches, which, together with the new information on identification criteria and migration patterns, left no further room for doubt that this indeed had been a Yelkouan Shearwater. As provenance was not an issue in this case, the species was added to Category A, bringing the British List to the milestone of 600 species.'

The Carl Zeiss Award 2016

Formerly awarded for the most instructive photograph, or series of photographs, supporting a rarity submission, the Carl Zeiss Award is now awarded for *the best overall submission* for which assessment has been completed during the previous 12 months. This year, 25 years after the inception of the award (*Brit. Birds* 84: 589), it is a pleasure to report that the overall quality of submissions has increased noticeably on those in previous years, although whether this is a direct reflection on the recent change in emphasis of the award is impossible to say. The very nature of bird identification and record submission means that this award will tend to be given to finders of birds that are particularly difficult to identify, but that generalisation doesn't always hold true. Last year, Mark Warren's third-placed record submission of a Eurasian Scops Owl *Otus scops* trapped at North Ronaldsay Bird Observatory was proof that a relatively straightforward identification can still lead down an interesting path (*Brit. Birds* 108: 540–544).

Each and every record submitted to BBRC is automatically entered for the CZA, and the shortlist is compiled through the year by BBRC members, who nominate various submissions as and when they are assessed. The voting process is 'blind', with all BBRC voting members reviewing that shortlist and giving each of the contenders a score from zero to five, without knowing the marks given by their colleagues. The scores are then simply tallied to give an overall winner.

The shortlist for 2016 comprised nine submissions. The top four are described and illustrated in more detail below but first, and in no particular order, the five highly commended record submissions that just missed out on a podium finish were as follows:

Mark Darlaston and Mike Langman put together an excellent account of a Yelkouan Shearwater *Puffinus yelkouan* seen off Berry Head, Devon, on 29th July 2008. A great deal of background research went into their submission, which took a long time to make its way past both BBRC and BOURC, but earlier this year the effort involved was rewarded when that bird became the 600th species on the British List. A paper on this record appears on pp. 448–456 of this issue.

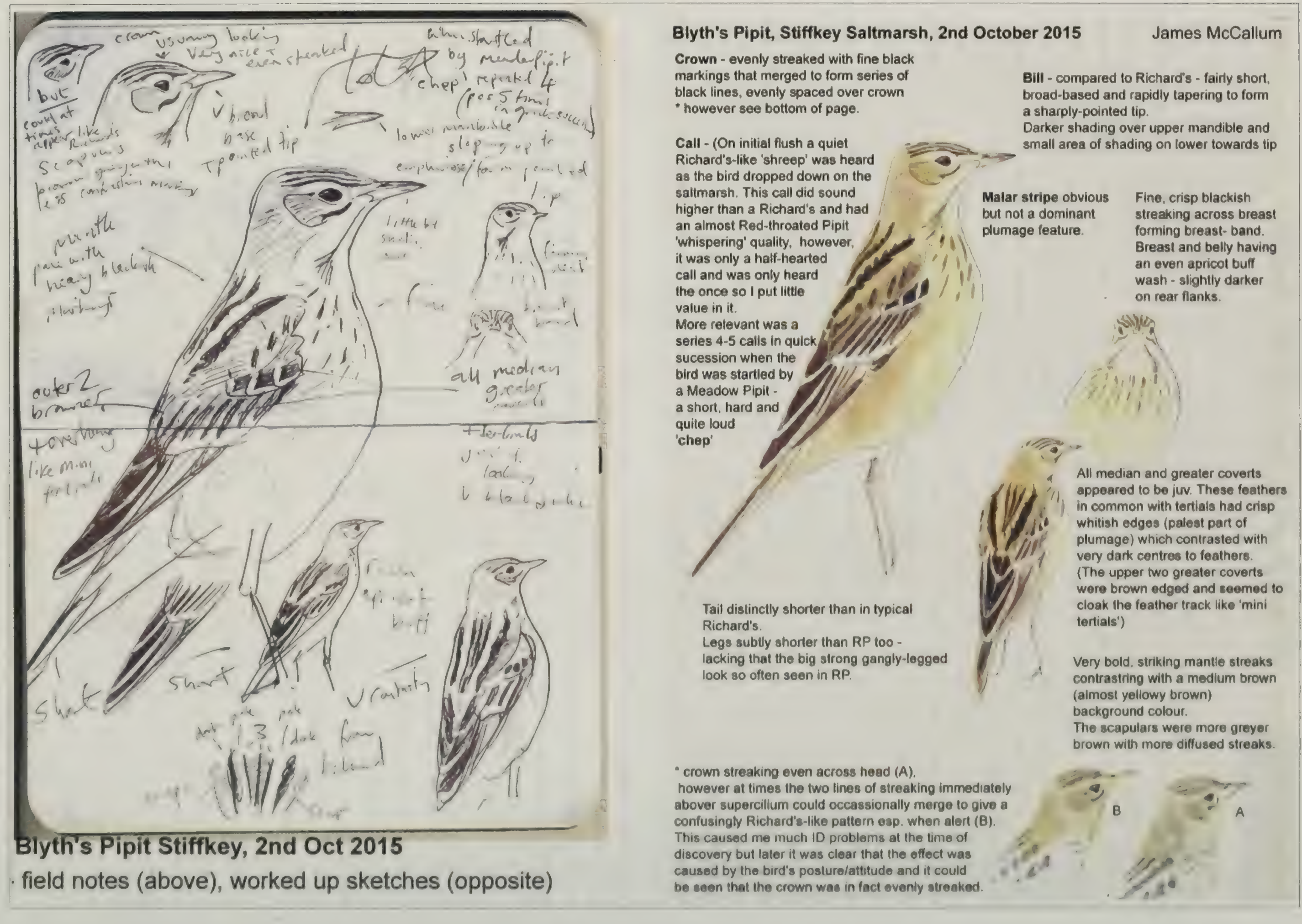
The record submission of a putative 'Steppe Buzzard' *Buteo buteo vulpinus* at Tunstall Forest, Suffolk, from 5th June to 30th August 2011, by M. T. and K. J. Cartwright was such a mammoth effort that it featured a contents page, as well as a series of photographs, a table and correspondence from one of Europe's most revered raptor specialists, Dick Forsman. The claim was ultimately found not proven, but it added greatly to BBRC's knowledge of what is required for an acceptable record of *vulpinus* in Britain.

Bob Flood's account of a Fea's Petrel *Pterodroma feae* off Scilly on 16th August 2015 was hugely evocative and superbly illustrated. It would surely have featured even higher on this year's shortlist had it been possible to allocate the bird to one of the two forms currently treated as subspecies of Fea's by BOU – nominate *feae* or 'Desertas Petrel' *P. f. deserta.*

The record submission by Ian Roberts of a Chinese Pond Heron *Ardeola bacchus* at Saltwood in Kent, in February–March 2014, contained impressive efforts to ascertain the bird's likely origin as well as a detailed account of the difficult and somewhat protracted identification.

Finally, the report of a Chestnut Bunting *Emberiza rutila* on Papa Westray, Orkney, in October 2015 by Julian Branscombe and Michael Schott featured a very honest account of their discovery and the subsequent identification process as well as an excellent series of images.

And so to this year's top selection. In fourth place was James McCallum's detailed submission of a Blyth's Pipit *Anthus godlewskii* at Stiffkey, Norfolk, on 2nd October 2015. James's account described the difficult and protracted field identification of what is one of the hardest vagrant passerines to nail in



crown usually looking very nice + even streaked
but could at times appear like Richard's
Scapulars browner greyer than less contrasting markings
V broad base T pointed tip
when startled by meadow pipit 'chep' repeated 4 (poss 5 times in quick succession)
lower mandible sloping up to emphasise/form pointed tip
little bit smaller
pale with heavy blackish streaking
outer 2 browner + overlying like mini tertials
all median greater coverts + tertials juv looking
Short
Short
pale
pale
dark
1 3
dark
V contrasty
from behind
buff
A
B

Blyth's Pipit, Stiffkey Saltmarsh, 2nd October 2015 James McCallum

Crown - evenly streaked with fine black markings that merged to form series of black lines, evenly spaced over crown
* however see bottom of page.

Bill - compared to Richard's - fairly short, broad-based and rapidly tapering to form a sharply-pointed tip.
Darker shading over upper mandible and small area of shading on lower towards tip

Call - (On initial flush a quiet Richard's-like 'shreep' was heard as the bird dropped down on the saltmarsh. This call did sound higher than a Richard's and had an almost Red-throated Pipit 'whispering' quality, however, it was only a half-hearted call and was only heard the once so I put little value in it.
More relevant was a series 4-5 calls in quick sucession when the bird was startled by a Meadow Pipit - a short, hard and quite loud **'chep'**

Malar stripe obvious but not a dominant plumage feature.

Fine, crisp blackish streaking across breast forming breast- band.
Breast and belly having an even apricot buff wash - slightly darker on rear flanks.

All median and greater coverts appeared to be juv. These feathers in common with tertials had crisp whitish edges (palest part of plumage) which contrasted with very dark centres to feathers.
(The upper two greater coverts were brown edged and seemed to cloak the feather track like 'mini tertials')

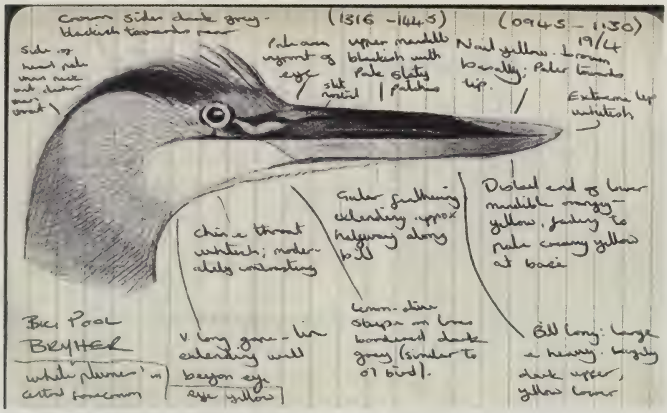
Tail distinctly shorter than in typical Richard's.
Legs subtly shorter than RP too - lacking that the big strong gangly-legged look so often seen in RP.

Very bold, striking mantle streaks contrastring with a medium brown (almost yellowy brown) background colour.
The scapulars were more greyer brown with more diffused streaks.

* crown streaking even across head (A),
however at times the two lines of streaking immediately above supercilium could occassionally merge to give a confusingly Richard's-like pattern esp. when alert (B).
This caused me much ID problems at the time of discovery but later it was clear that the effect was caused by the bird's posture/attitude and it could be seen that the crown was in fact evenly streaked.

Blyth's Pipit Stiffkey, 2nd Oct 2015
· field notes (above), worked up sketches (opposite)

Fig. 1. Extract from James McCallum's record submission of a Blyth's Pipit *Anthus godlewskii* at Stiffkey, Norfolk, 2nd October 2015.


Crown sides dark grey - blackish towards rear
(1316 - 1445)
(0945 - 1130)
19/4
Side of head pale [illegible] darker ear covert
Pale area infront of eye
slit nostril
upper mandible blackish with pale slaty patches
Nail yellow. brown basally; paler towards tip.
Extreme tip whitish
Distal end of lower mandible orangy-yellow, fading to pale creamy yellow at base
Gular feathering extending approx halfway along bill
chin & throat whitish; moderately contrasting
Lemon-lime stripe on lores bordered dark grey (similar to 07 bird).
Bill long: large & heavy. Largely dark upper, yellow lower
Big Pool
BRYHER
white plumes in central forecrown
V. long gape-line extending well beyond eye
eye yellow

② Original field sketch, Bryher 19/04/2015.

Head: Forehead mid-dark grey. Feathers of forehead /forecrown occasionally held erect, creating ragged crest. Crown off-white centrally; blackish-grey' laterally – sides appearing darker towards rear forming distinct cap (cap usually paler in 1W *cinerea*). Head plumes blackish and relatively short, tapering to a moderate point on nape. An ill-defined greyish-white area was apparent in front of the eye. Ear coverts pale grey, bordered below by a distinct dark line running from gape. Lores dominated by a narrow, diamond-shaped area of pale yellowish-green skin, framed above and below in dark grey – very similar to the 07 bird. Chin, throat and area below ear-coverts off-white, moderately contrasting with remainder of head.

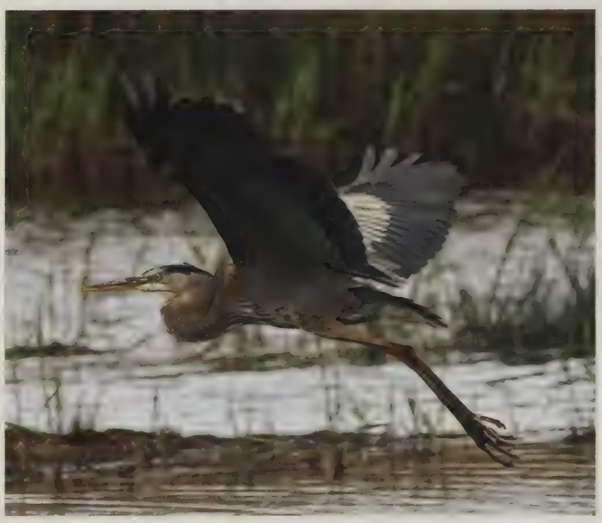
Fig. 2. Extracts from Ashley Fisher's record submission of a Great Blue Heron *Ardea herodias* on St Mary's, Scilly, in April–May 2015.

Britain. Features that were thought to be anomalous were investigated and chased up in the field before the correct identification was finally made, and the field sketches were worked up into finished paintings, crucially showing the 'paper trail' of how the identification process played out (fig. 1).

In a tie for second place were the records of a Great Blue Heron *Ardea herodias* on St Mary's, Scilly, in April–May 2015 and a Short-toed Treecreeper *Certhia brachydactyla* at Beachy Head, Sussex, on 27th October 2015. The Great Blue Heron was a second-calendar-year bird that was, remarkably, found in the same place and by the same observer as Britain's first, in December 2007. Ashley Fisher's account of the circumstances was followed by a detailed critique of the bird's appearance and a series of clear and informative images that showed all of the requisite features (figs. 2 & 3). Great Blue Heron remains a big call on this side of the Atlantic and there have been a couple of particularly difficult variant Grey Herons *A. cinerea* to test the mettle of observers in recent years. Ashley's description clearly ruled out that possibility and his efforts have provided an invaluable addition to the BBRC archives of this species.

Meanwhile, in Sussex, John, Doreen and David Cooper's description of a Short-toed Treecreeper tested the Committee's knowledge of the intricate wing formula and features of this extremely subtle species. Thankfully, John had laid out all the evidence in an admirably clear and methodical way with an excellent series of close-up and annotated photographs (figs. 4 & 5) accompanied by reference to published papers and articles, as well as other records of Short-toed Treecreeper in Britain and Sweden. The plumage and wing details were not, by themselves, completely diagnostic, but the call was noted on a couple of occasions and the Committee was confident that the correct identification had been reached.

This year's (clear) winner was as much an account of an outstanding and unexpected ornithological event as a detailed critique of the identification of not one, but nine birds. Edward Hunter's record submission of a pair of Iberian Chiffchaffs *Phylloscopus ibericus* successfully breeding and producing two broods in Gower represents a new departure for this award, and an event that we do not expect to be repeated any time soon! This record was also reported to the Rare Breeding Birds Panel and constitutes the first confirmed breeding of Iberian Chiffchaff in the UK. Ed put in an estimated 60–70 hours of observation over a six-week period in the spring of 2015 and managed to establish beyond doubt that not only was there a singing male Iberian Chiffchaff at the site, but that it had managed to attract a mate that was also giving the distinctive down-slurred 'seuuu' call. The pair successfully reared not one but two broods, totalling at least seven sighting. Tertials dull blue-grey, narrowly fringed/tipped a paler greyish-white. Primaries and secondaries blackish-grey.



Underwing: Seen very well on numerous occasions, as wings often raised/flapped when adjusting balance, or in flight. Lesser and median coverts blackish-grey contrasting noticeably with paler greater coverts. Underwing of *cinerea* appeared paler and uniformly grey, lacking such contrast.

④ Note the blackish-grey lesser and median underwing coverts contrasting with the paler grey greater coverts. The underwing of Grey Heron is more uniformly grey. Also note the relatively dark grey flank and the long, two-tone legs. Lower Moors, 03/05/2015.

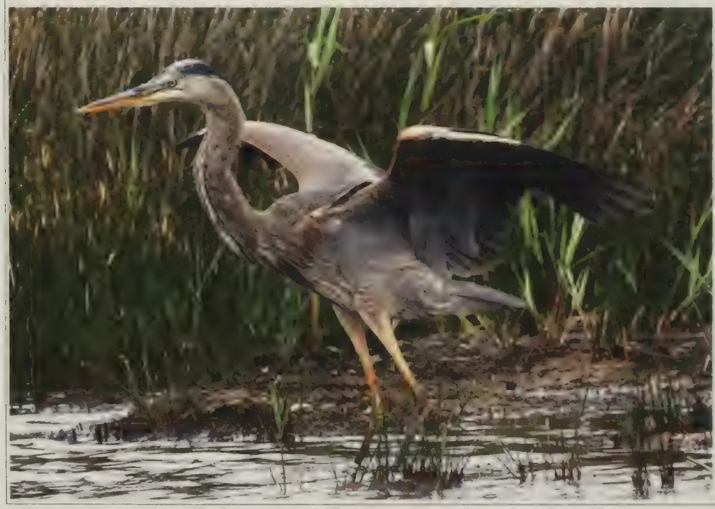
Bare Parts

Bill: Larger, heavier and less evenly tapered than in most *cinerea*: Side-on, the culmen appeared almost straight, with the lower mandible running parallel to this for about two thirds of its length before noticeably curving upwards towards the tip, forming a fairly prominent gonydeal angle. The upper mandible was almost entirely blackish-brown except for the cutting edges and tip (about a sixth) which were a dull, dirty-orange: the lower mandible was pale yellow becoming distinctly more orange towards the gonys. **Eyes:** Yellow. **Legs:** Two-toned; yellowish with a diffuse, dirty blackish-brown wash on outside of knee and tarsus. Looked noticeably longer than *cinerea*, even without comparison.

Vocalizations

I heard the bird call on 11 separate occasions: mostly in flight, but in four instances, when approached closely by a fly-by Grey Heron. Anyone familiar with the alarm call of Grey Heron would recognize the call of Great Blue Heron as being different. It has a different quality; being louder, lower in pitch and perhaps a touch harsher. To my ears, it sounded similar, if not identical, to the [Great Blue Heron] track '*alarm croaks given when taking flight_MD*' in the Sibley Bird Guide app.

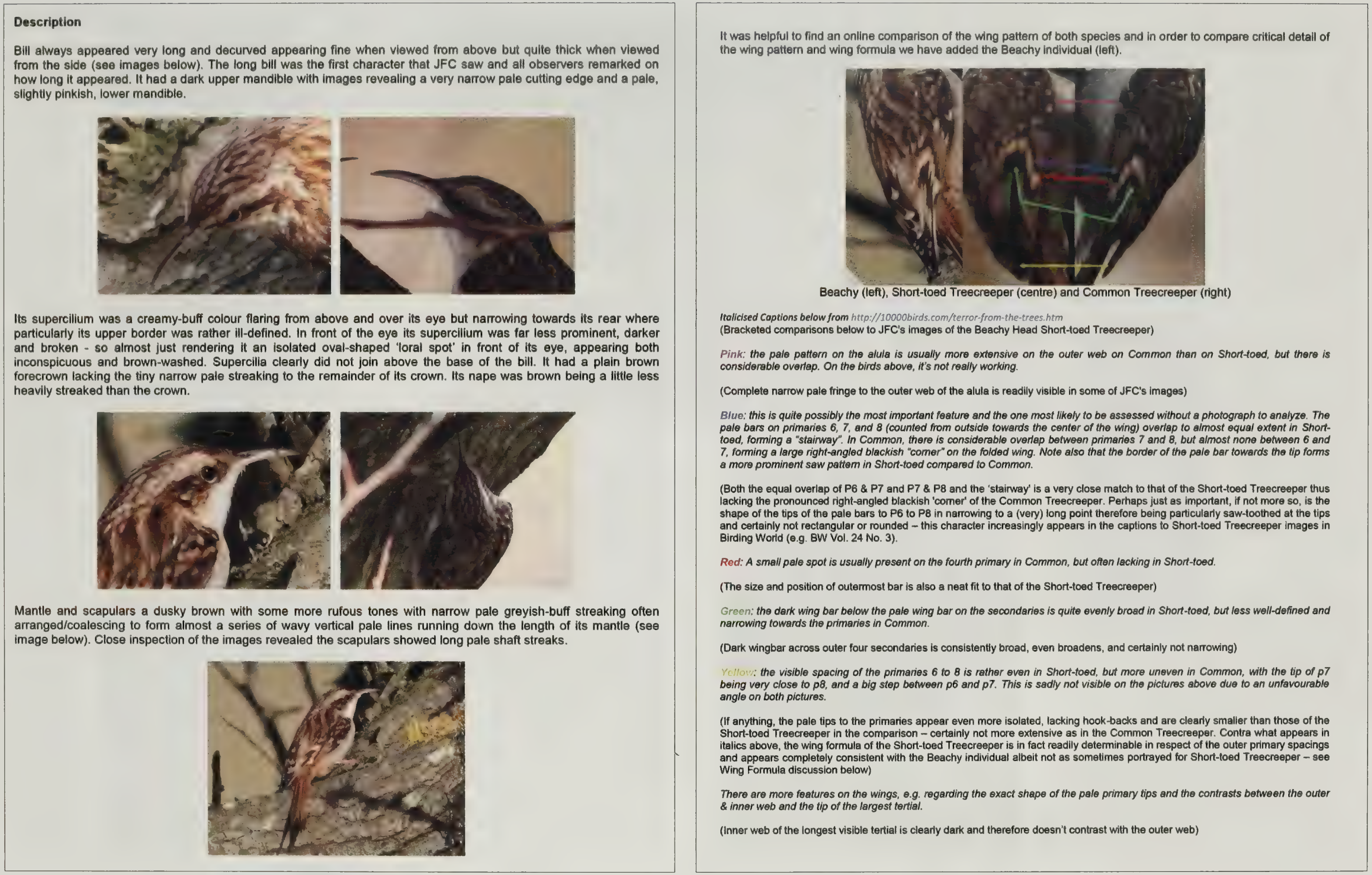
Regrettably, I did not make the effort to sound record this bird.



⑤ This image illustrates many of features of Great Blue Heron: The large head and heavy bill with angle at gonys; the disproportionally long neck with dark, rusty-hued, neck-sides and narrow grey foreneck streaking; the rusty, grey and white streaked 'epaulettes;' the rufous marginal and carpal coverts; the blackish-grey lesser & median underwing-coverts contrasting with paler greater coverts; the rufous streaked upper thighs (note the greater extent of tibial feathering here), and the long, two-toned legs.

Lower Moors 03/05/2015.

Fig. 3. Extracts from Ashley Fisher's record submission of a Great Blue Heron *Ardea herodias* on St Mary's, Scilly, in April–May 2015.



Description

Bill always appeared very long and decurved appearing fine when viewed from above but quite thick when viewed from the side (see images below). The long bill was the first character that JFC saw and all observers remarked on how long it appeared. It had a dark upper mandible with images revealing a very narrow pale cutting edge and a pale, slightly pinkish, lower mandible.

Its supercilium was a creamy-buff colour flaring from above and over its eye but narrowing towards its rear where particularly its upper border was rather ill-defined. In front of the eye its supercilium was far less prominent, darker and broken - so almost just rendering it an isolated oval-shaped 'loral spot' in front of its eye, appearing both inconspicuous and brown-washed. Supercilia clearly did not join above the base of the bill. It had a plain brown forecrown lacking the tiny narrow pale streaking to the remainder of its crown. Its nape was brown being a little less heavily streaked than the crown.

Mantle and scapulars a dusky brown with some more rufous tones with narrow pale greyish-buff streaking often arranged/coalescing to form almost a series of wavy vertical pale lines running down the length of its mantle (see image below). Close inspection of the images revealed the scapulars showed long pale shaft streaks.

It was helpful to find an online comparison of the wing pattern of both species and in order to compare critical detail of the wing pattern and wing formula we have added the Beachy individual (left).

Beachy (left), Short-toed Treecreeper (centre) and Common Treecreeper (right)

Italicised Captions below from http://10000birds.com/terror-from-the-trees.htm
(Bracketed comparisons below to JFC's images of the Beachy Head Short-toed Treecreeper)

Pink: the pale pattern on the alula is usually more extensive on the outer web on Common than on Short-toed, but there is considerable overlap. On the birds above, it's not really working.

(Complete narrow pale fringe to the outer web of the alula is readily visible in some of JFC's images)

Blue: this is quite possibly the most important feature and the one most likely to be assessed without a photograph to analyze. The pale bars on primaries 6, 7, and 8 (counted from outside towards the center of the wing) overlap to almost equal extent in Short-toed, forming a "stairway". In Common, there is considerable overlap between primaries 7 and 8, but almost none between 6 and 7, forming a large right-angled blackish "corner" on the folded wing. Note also that the border of the pale bar towards the tip forms a more prominent saw pattern in Short-toed compared to Common.

(Both the equal overlap of P6 & P7 and P7 & P8 and the 'stairway' is a very close match to that of the Short-toed Treecreeper thus lacking the pronounced right-angled blackish 'corner' of the Common Treecreeper. Perhaps just as important, if not more so, is the shape of the tips of the pale bars to P6 to P8 in narrowing to a (very) long point therefore being particularly saw-toothed at the tips and certainly not rectangular or rounded – this character increasingly appears in the captions to Short-toed Treecreeper images in Birding World (e.g. BW Vol. 24 No. 3).

Red: A small pale spot is usually present on the fourth primary in Common, but often lacking in Short-toed.

(The size and position of outermost bar is also a neat fit to that of the Short-toed Treecreeper)

Green: the dark wing bar below the pale wing bar on the secondaries is quite evenly broad in Short-toed, but less well-defined and narrowing towards the primaries in Common.

(Dark wingbar across outer four secondaries is consistently broad, even broadens, and certainly not narrowing)

Yellow: the visible spacing of the primaries 6 to 8 is rather even in Short-toed, but more uneven in Common, with the tip of p7 being very close to p8, and a big step between p6 and p7. This is sadly not visible on the pictures above due to an unfavourable angle on both pictures.

(If anything, the pale tips to the primaries appear even more isolated, lacking hook-backs and are clearly smaller than those of the Short-toed Treecreeper in the comparison – certainly not more extensive as in the Common Treecreeper. Contra what appears in italics above, the wing formula of the Short-toed Treecreeper is in fact readily determinable in respect of the outer primary spacings and appears completely consistent with the Beachy individual albeit not as sometimes portrayed for Short-toed Treecreeper – see Wing Formula discussion below)

There are more features on the wings, e.g. regarding the exact shape of the pale primary tips and the contrasts between the outer & inner web and the tip of the largest tertial.

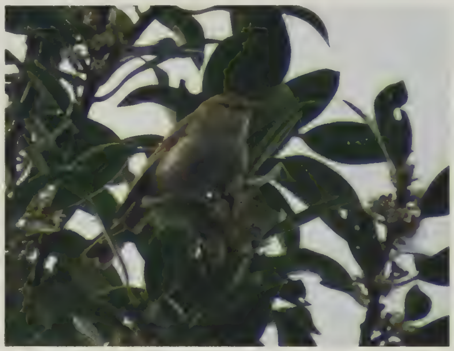
(Inner web of the longest visible tertial is clearly dark and therefore doesn't contrast with the outer web)

Figs. 4 & 5. Extract from John and Doreen Cooper's submitted account of a Short-toed Treecreeper *Certhia brachydactyla* at Beachy Head, Sussex, 27th October 2015.

fledged offspring. Details of the young learning the calls and even the song of the adults were given, and the whole submission was a masterclass of careful and methodical observation (fig. 6).

Ed will be presented with his prize, a pair of the exceptional ZEISS Victory SF 10 × 42 binoculars, at the British Birdwatching Fair at Rutland Water on Friday 19th August. Further details will be posted on the BBRC website (www.bbrc.org.uk) in due course, where a selection of previous winning images can be viewed along with links to the previous competition write-ups in *BB*.

On 14th and 15th May 2015, while out birding in Gower, I could hear a song drifting to me distantly and intermittently; on the 15th, due to the wind, it was slightly clearer. Despite the distance it sounded like an "interesting" Chiffchaff. Intrigued, I returned later with more time to tackle the subject.

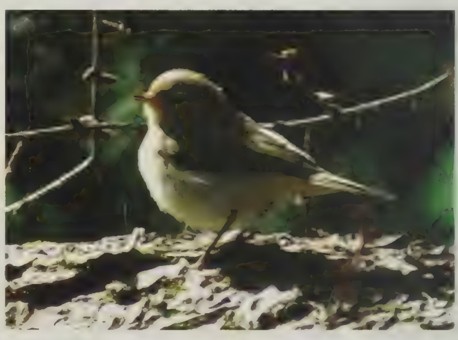


Male

By the next evening I had listened to the bird more or less continuously for a good 4–5 hours in dense cover and managed two close glimpses. On song the bird was to my ear an Iberian Chiffchaff as I had heard before, but I had not seen any real coloration or detail on the bird. Gradually, I learnt its song posts and its circuit and created a viewpoint below a tree that it visited occasionally.

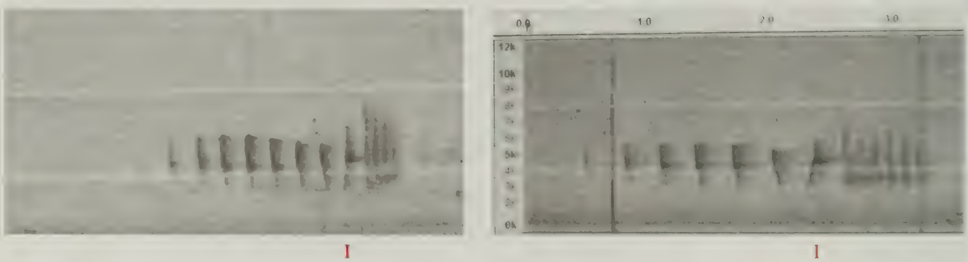
Over the following days I eventually obtained views of the bird in slightly better light and was now convinced it was an Iberian Chiffchaff. I took video footage with a Canon Power shot digital camera which gave me sound recordings, and which I converted to WAV files and put through Audacity to produce sonograms which confirmed the three-part pattern of Iberian Chiffchaff, the frequency/pitch and length on paper as well as to the ear (ref : *The Sound Approach to Birding*, www.birdingfrontiers.com).

Over the coming weeks I visited the site as regularly as possible in an attempt to listen and record any song variants that occurred…



Juvenile

Sonograms
1. Typical song
This was the song given the majority of the time:

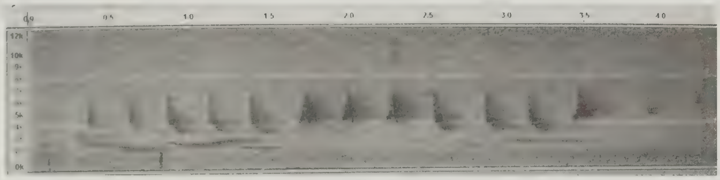


Generally, this bird seemed to use just one single upward middle-section note (I), usually followed by a long, repeated trill on the recordings I sampled. It fits the typical three-sector Iberian pattern, frequency and volume.

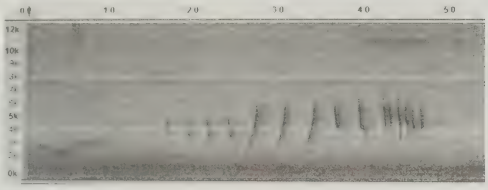
Fig. 6. Extracts from Edward Hunter's record submission of a pair of Iberian Chiffchaffs *Phylloscopus ibericus* breeding in Gower, 2015.

Fig. 6. *cont.*

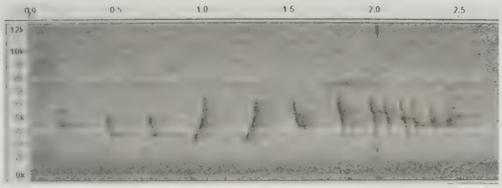
2. Interesting breeding song
The female greeting song
When the female came off the nest into the male's view his song changed.



2a Here the song shows a four-part structure, without the final cluster, the last being a single rising note.



2b Here a three-part structure but with three middle-section uprises, thus almost a four-section phrase, or with a two-part/staggered third section.



2c Here more of a four-section song but with two up-rises and again almost four parts.

Heard only on three occasions in the whole listening period, May to July, twice during the first brood and once during the second (when I recorded this and witnessed her show to the male). Do both races/populations do this? Could it potentially be a way to separate them if they are distinct subspecies?

Acknowledgments

BBRC is grateful to all those observers who submit their records of rarities for consideration, either directly to the Committee or via our arrangement with websites (BirdGuides www.birdguides.com and Rare Bird Alert www.rarebirdalert.co.uk). We are extremely grateful to Carl Zeiss for their continued support of the Committee and this award.

Paul French, BBRC Chairman, 1 Greenfield Bungalows, Easington, East Yorkshire, HU12 0TZ;
e-mail chair@bbrc.org.uk

BBRC
British Birds Rarities Committee

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Museum Consultant Brian Small • **Summariser** Reg Thorpe

A history of Bird Photograph of the Year

Richard Chandler, David Tipling and
Richard Aspinall

Abstract The *BB* Bird Photograph of the Year competition has been running for 40 years. The award represents a fascinating time line of the development of wildlife photography across an era that has seen dramatic improvements in equipment and, particularly, the emergence of the digital format. This article traces some of the themes that have emerged in the first 40 years of the competition and celebrates the artistry of the successful competitors.

This year, 2016, marks the 40th *British Birds* Bird Photograph of the Year competition – an award that, as far as we are aware, is the world's longest-running bird photograph competition. The results of this year's competition can be found on pp. 434–447.

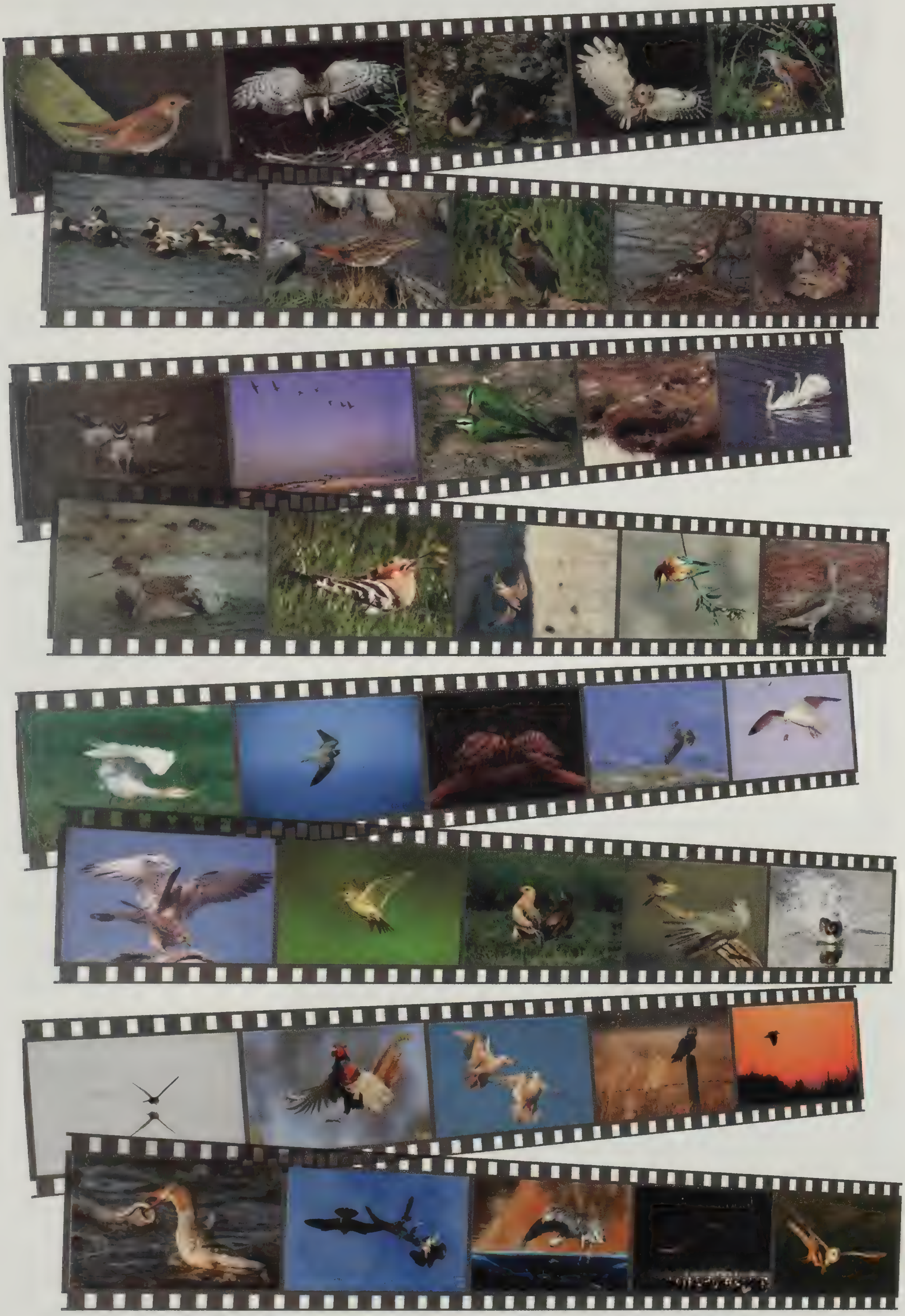
In 1976 (*Brit. Birds* 69: 421), entries were invited for the first in a new series of annual awards for the best bird photograph – 'Bird Photograph of the Year', or BPY. The winner of that first competition was Mike Wilkes' photograph of a Common Nightingale *Luscinia megarhynchos*, which appeared in the April 1977 issue of *BB* (*Brit. Birds* 70: 133, plate 25); it was one of the earliest colour photographs to be published in *BB*, although the other four top-placed images that year were printed in black and white. Mike Wilkes was presented with an engraved silver salver and a cheque for £100 by Sir Peter Scott. The following year the top three images were printed in colour, with those of two further runners-up in black and white; from 1979 all the winning entries were published in colour.

In its first 40 years, the competition has been won by 27 individuals, of whom two (Edmund Fellowes and Roger Tidman) have each won four times, two (Jens Eriksen and Chris Knights) have won three times, and three (Kevin Carlson, Hanne Eriksen and Alan Williams) have each won twice. And 20 photographers have won the competition once. The most recent of the 'serial' winners was Edmund Fellowes, who won for the fourth time in 2014. A total of 187 photographers have had their entries shortlisted; of these, Mike Lane (26), Chris Knights (25), Mike Wilkes (25), Jens Eriksen (24), Gordon Langsbury (23) and Tony Hamblin (22) have each achieved 20 or more shortlisted entries, while Jens Eriksen leads the number of top-three finishes, with nine.

Photographic formats and equipment

The competition has provided an interesting commentary on the general development of photography over that period, and of bird photography in particular (see figs. 1 & 2, table 1). The competition started at a time when photographing birds in black and white was still the norm, as a quick scan through back issues of *BB* will confirm. However, the popularity of colour transparency film, particularly Kodachrome, was gathering momentum, as magazines began to use increasing amounts of colour within their pages. With the arrival of Fuji Sensia/Provia 100, there was a step up in film speed and corresponding quality, which led to these films being widely adopted. Latterly, Fuji Velvia became popular with some photographers for its richer colours, but Fuji Sensia dominated the later years of the film era, until the dawn of digital.

After the first two or three years of the competition, colour transparency was the film



272. The winning entries from 40 years of Bird Photograph of the Year (in chronological order, 1977–2016).

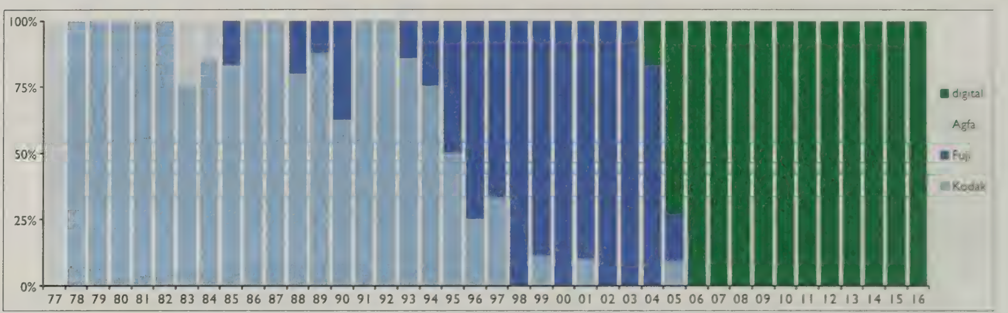


Fig. 1. Photographic format used for the winning images in Bird Photograph of the Year competitions, 1977–2016. The data are shown as the percentage of the photos for which this information is reported each year (in the annual report in *BB*); this has varied from year to year – and in the first competition the film type was given only for the winner.

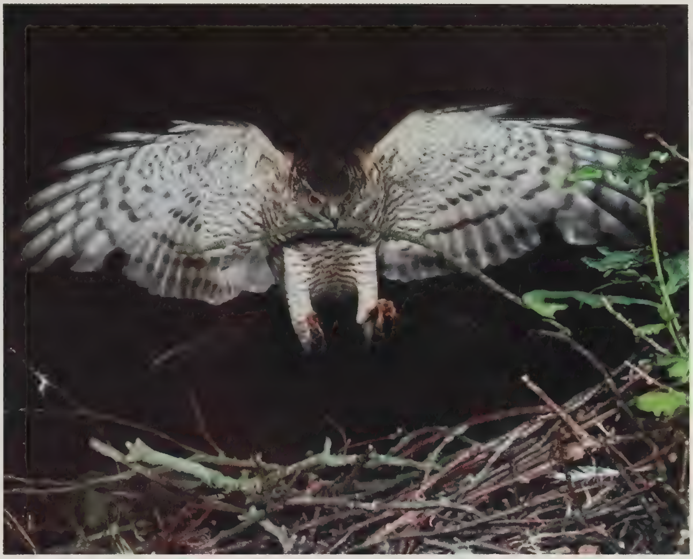
medium of choice, with Kodak's Kodachrome 64 the initial favourite. From around 1994, Fuji gained in popularity with the introduction of faster and finer-grained emulsions. From the early years of the 2000s, digital images began to make an impact, gradually at first. Digital single lens reflex cameras (DSLRs) had been available since about 2000, and within a couple of years digital images started to match the quality available from transparencies. BPY adopted this change and allowed digital entries from 2004. The speed of the conversion to a digital format by nature photographers is well illustrated by the statistics in fig. 1; very few transparencies were submitted after 2004 and the competition was almost entirely digital from 2006 onwards (15% of all entries were digital in 2004, rising to 65% in 2005 and 88% in 2006 – and all those in the final shortlist were digital by 2006). The capabilities of the digital format have taken photographic competitions generally on to a new level, and the relative affordability of digital equipment has broadened the appeal. It has also necessitated a level of competence with digital processing, which is a key part of a winning entry in a competition such as BPY. For more on processing see *Brit. Birds* 101: 39–42.

Other interesting statistics relate to the choice of focal length for lenses. In 1976, all lenses were manual focus; the autofocus lenses we all take for granted today were just a pipe dream. Yet nest photography was already diminishing in popularity and the availability of reasonable quality, long focal-length lenses encouraged bird photographers to take more photographs away from the nest. In the earlier years of BPY, wait-and-see hide photography allowed/required the use of relatively short focal-length lenses. Good examples using this technique include Don Smith's winning Tawny Owl *Strix aluco* image in 1980, taken with a 35 mm lens (*Brit. Birds* 73: 203, plate 113); Tony Hamblin's fifth-placed photo of a Whin-

Mike Wilkes

273. 1977 The first BPY winner, a Common Nightingale *Luscinia megarhynchos*, photographed in Warwickshire in May 1976. *Technical details: Nikon 'F' camera, 135 mm Nikon lens with 2x converter, using a Braun F700 flash with two heads at 1 m; 1/60th, f8, Agfachrome Professional 'S'.*

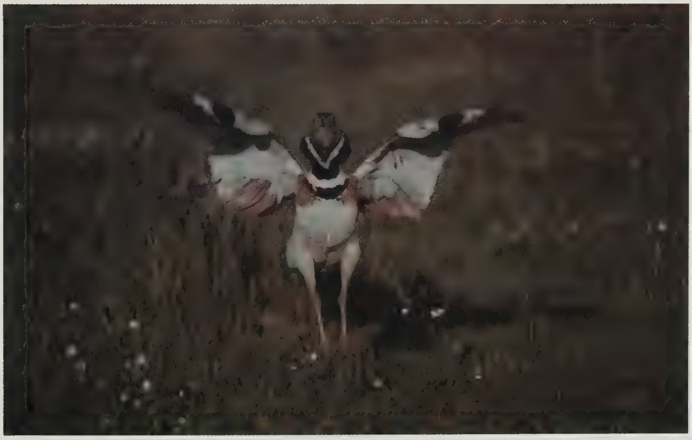
chat *Saxicola rubetra* in 1987, taken with a 28 mm lens (*Brit. Birds* 80: 306, plate 151); and Mark Hamblin's fourth-placed photo of a Common Buzzard *Buteo buteo* in 1996, taken with a 28 mm lens (*Brit. Birds* 89: 313, plate 123). But to achieve goods results without the use of a hide, telephoto lenses became a prerequisite, with 500 mm and 600 mm lenses being particularly favoured (fig. 2).



274. 1978 The second winner of the BPY title was this dramatic head-on shot of a female Eurasian Sparrowhawk *Accipiter nisus* in Yorkshire in May 1977. Peter Lowes built a tower hide in order to photograph this bird at its nest, some 6 m from the ground in an oak tree, which was a level of planning not uncommon in the early years of this competition.
Technical details: Pentax SP500, Vivitar zoom 75–260 mm lens, Clive Courteney Power Pack with two flash heads, Kodachrome 64.

During the 1990s, lens quality improved, allowing teleconverters to be used more frequently with no great loss of quality. In the past ten years, the rapid development of DSLR technology, and sensor quality in particular, has allowed higher and higher ISO values to be used with only limited sacrifice of image quality, and this has increased the popularity of teleconverters. Typically, it is now possible to shoot an image with a DSLR using a shutter speed fives times or more greater than was achievable using Fuji Sensia 100 film and still get a far superior image in terms of quality; consequently, action images of birds have now been taken to a new level. This also allows for far greater control over depth of field; although the majority of images are shot with a shallow depth of field, we now have far greater and increasing creative freedom.

The 500 mm telephoto lens is now the most favoured by bird photographers. The fast f4 versions work seamlessly with teleconverters; when these are coupled with cropped-sensor cameras, we now have far greater telephoto reach, allowing many impressive images to be captured without the use of a hide. The development of autofocus, coupled with the ability to shoot at ever greater shutter speeds,



275. 1987 An iconic winner from the early years of the competition was this magnificent study of a displaying Little Bustard *Tetrax tetrax*, photographed in Portugal in May 1986. After coming second in the competition three years in a row, 1983–85, Kevin Carlson produced two consecutive winners, this being the first; he also triumphed with a Purple Heron *Ardea purpurea* image in 1988. His Little Bustard photo was also unusual in being voted the outright winner by all four judges.
Technical details: Nikon FE2, Vivitar 70–210 mm lens, Kodachrome 64.

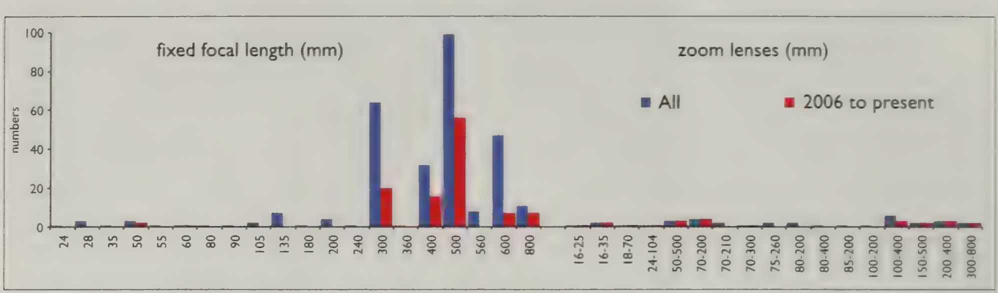


Fig. 2. The focal length of lenses used for the winning entries in the Bird Photograph of the Year competitions, 1977–2016; data are also shown for the period from 2006 to 2016, when all shortlisted photographs have been taken using digital cameras. Fixed focal-length lenses have been used for over 89% of the winning photographs (83% since 2006). Data from the annual BPY reports in *BB*.

allows action shots previously only dreamed of to be achieved. Similarly, images previously possible only with elaborate, high-speed flash set-ups can now be executed in natural light. Good examples from BPY images include Roger Tidman's winning shot of a drinking Common Swift *Apus apus* in 2007 (*Brit. Birds* 100: 489, plate 200), and Graham Catley's fourth-placed photo of a displaying Sedge Warbler *Acrocephalus schoenobaenus* in 2012 (*Brit. Birds* 105: 464, plate 247).

Despite the flexibility of zoom lenses, fig. 2 suggests that rather few of our top bird photographers pick them as their first choice in the field, presumably because image quality has failed to match that of prime lenses. Yet the quality of top-end zoom lenses has shown great improvements recently, and it will be interesting to see whether fixed focal-length lenses are still dominant in ten years' time. Twenty years ago, most birders used a fixed-magnification eyepiece for their telescope, whereas now the vast majority use a zoom eyepiece – perhaps the same will be true for photographers. The continuing improvements to the quality of the super-zoom lenses used in bridge cameras is something else to look out for in the future, as is the quality of HD video now possible from a typical DSLR.

In terms of the brands used by bird photographers, the manufacturer's league table is dominated by Canon and Nikon equipment – and although this is particularly true in the digital era (since 2006), it was also the case to a greater or lesser extent across the entire 40 years of the competition (table 1).

Table 1. The brand of camera body and lens used for the winning photographs in BPY, for all years and for digital equipment 2006–16. Data taken from the annual BPY reports in *BB*.

Camera	All years (n=327)	2006–16 (n=132)	Lens	All years (n=326)	2006–16 (n=132)
Canon	56.9%	85.6%	Canon	55.2%	83.3%
Hasselblad	0.3%	-	Leica/Leitz	2.5%	-
Leica	0.3%	-	Minolta	0.6%	-
Mamiya	0.3%	-	Nikkor/Nikon	23.9%	9.8%
Minolta	0.9%	-	Novoflex	3.1%	-
Nikon	33.3%	14.4%	Pentax	0.9%	-
Olympus	6.1%	-	Planar	0.3%	-
Pentax	1.8%	-	Schneider	0.3%	-
			Sekkor	0.3%	-
			Sigma	5.8%	6.8%
			Tamron	1.2%	-
			Telyt	0.3%	-
			Vivitar	1.2%	-
			Zuiko	4.3%	-

Hanne Eriksen

276. 1989 The first of two consecutive winning entries for Hanne Eriksen was this captivating image of mating Blue-cheeked Bee-eaters *Merops persicus*, photographed near a recently discovered breeding colony in Oman in April 1988 using a car as a hide. Hanne won the competition again the following year, 1990, with a portrait of a Black-winged Stilt *Himantopus himantopus* family, again in Oman. *Technical details: Nikon FA, Novoflex 600 mm lens, 1/250, f.8, Fujichrome 100 Professional.*

With the advent of digital photography, it wasn't long before birders began to attach a compact camera (or, more recently a smartphone) to their telescope, and digiscoping was born. BPY embraced this innovation from the outset, since it facilitated bird identification and the documentation of behaviour in situations that would not be possible with conventional lenses. A separate award was introduced in 2005, supported by the Eric Hosking Charitable Trust. The first winner was Barry Yates, whose portrait of a mating pair of Black-winged Stilts in Spain (*Brit. Birds* 98: 426, plate 261) was also placed 12th overall in the main award. Since those early days, the sensor size and quality of compact cameras has improved considerably, and some of the results are truly impressive – see, for example, the singing Lanceolated Warbler *Locustella lanceolata* by Pete Morris in Hokkaido (*Brit. Birds* 103: 458, plate 270).

The bird species photographed

In terms of the birds themselves, some interesting patterns have emerged from the 40 years of the competition. There is a four-way tie among the species that have featured most often in the winning photograph, between Grey Heron *Ardea cinerea*, Great Crested Grebe *Podiceps cristatus*, Green Woodpecker *Picus viridis* and Peregrine Falcon *Falco peregrinus*, each of them with two wins apiece. In terms of featuring in the top three, there is a nine-way tie for the top ranking, with the following species having appeared three times each over the 40 years: Grey Partridge *Perdix perdix*, Black-winged Stilt *Himantopus himantopus*, Woodcock *Scolopax rusticola*, Herring Gull *Larus argentatus*, Tawny Owl, Short-eared Owl *Asio flammeus*, Common Swift, Common Kingfisher *Alcedo atthis* and Peregrine Falcon. But, in terms of all the shortlisted images featured in the *BB* competition write-ups, the Common Kestrel *F. tinnunculus*, with 11 appearances, has proved the most photogenic, with four others just behind on ten: Grey Heron, Common Buzzard, Black-winged Stilt and Little Owl *Athene noctua*. A total of 263 bird species have featured in the shortlisted photos, as well as various other taxa (including a Brown Hare *Lepus europaeus*) that were each an

Mike Lane

277. 1995 Another magnificent bee-eater winner from the second decade of the competition was this European Bee-eater *Merops apiaster* photo from Mike Lane, taken in Spain in May 1994. *Technical details: Canon EOS 5, Canon 600 mm f4, 1/125, f.8, Kodachrome 64.*

integral part of the photo.

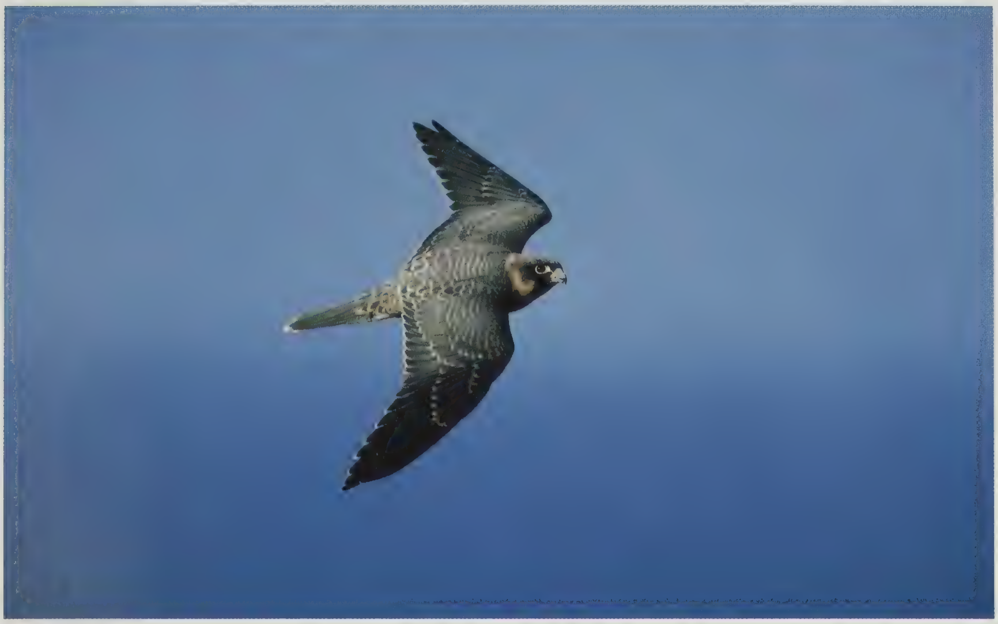
A burgeoning 'hides for hire' business has swept Europe in recent years, so that once-hard-to-photograph species such as the Great Bustard *Otis tarda* and European Roller *Coracias garrulus* are now readily accessible, and the judges are seeing many images entered that are taken from these locations. Other species regularly attracted to baited sites include the Common Buzzard, Grey Heron, White-tailed Eagle *Haliaeetus albicilla* and Common Kingfisher; in the year after the Rothiemurchus fish farm, near Aviemore, set up hides for observing diving Ospreys *Pandion haliaetus*, we saw many entries from this site. Although these situations can reveal interesting aspects of behaviour, perhaps not previously photographed, such 'stage-managed' and manipulated images rarely make the top 20, even though many are striking and of outstanding quality.

Judging

The method of judging is for all the images to be reviewed, and then with one or more iterations, depending on the number and quality of the entries, those in contention are reduced to a final shortlist of around 20. The judges then vote independently on these remaining images (scoring 1 for the winner, 2 for second place, and so on). When all the scores are summed, the winner is the photograph with the lowest total. In some years the decision is almost unanimous; in other years the contest is much closer.

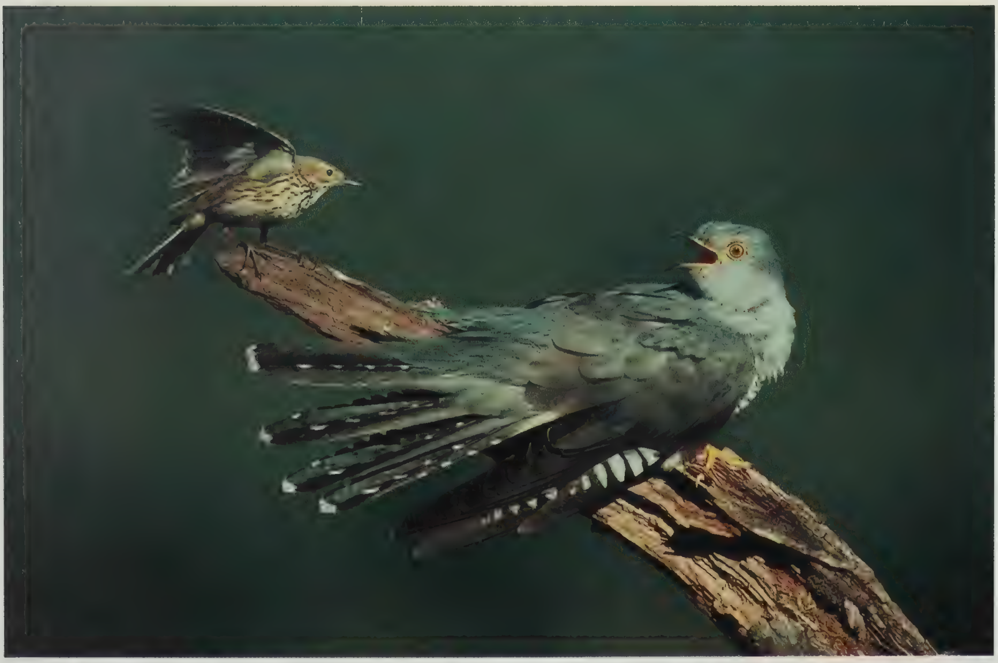
Table 2. Judges of Bird Photograph of the Year (listed in alphabetical order).

Tim Appleton	2000–16	Peter Kennerley	2007–16
Richard Chandler	1981–2016	Simon King	2011–14
Robin Chittenden	1995–2016	Chris Packham	2010
David Cromack	1998–2000	Mike Richards	1978–81
M. D. (Derrick) England	1977	Roger Riddington	2001–02
James Ferguson-Lees	1977–78	Tim Sharrock	1977–2000
David Hosking	1997–2016	Don Smith	1981–96
Eric Hosking	1977–90	Roger Tidman	1993
Rob Hume	1994–96	David Tipling	2002–16



Jens Eriksen

278. 1998 Almost a decade after his wife Hanne claimed two consecutive winners, Jens Eriksen repeated the feat with this Sooty Falcon *Falco concolor* photo, taken in Oman in October 1997. This was one of the few images of birds in flight to win the competition in the first 20 years of the award, and followed his winning Cattle Egret *Bubulcus ibis* photo in 1997.
Technical details: Nikon F5, Nikkor 300 mm f2.8 with 1.4x converter, 1/500, f4, Fujichrome 50 Velvia.



Edmund Fellowes

279. 2005 The last BPY winner on film was the second of Edmund Fellowes' four wins in the competition, more than a quarter-century after his first, an image of a Green Woodpecker *Picus viridis* in 1979. This Common Cuckoo *Cuculus canorus* being mobbed by a Meadow Pipit *Anthus pratensis*, photographed in Dumfries & Galloway in April 2004, was a much-admired winner from the third decade of the award, and a fitting way for the film era to end.
Technical details: Canon EOS 5, Canon 300 mm with 2x converter, 1/125, f8, Fuji Sensia 100.

Table 3. Sponsors of Bird Photograph of the Year competition (listed in chronological order).

1980–86	Famous Grouse (Matthew Gloag)
1987–91	Christopher Helm, Collins
1992–94	Christopher Helm, Collins, Windrush
1995	Canon, Windrush
1996	Canon
1997	Canon, Collins
1998	Christopher Helm, Eric Hosking Charitable Trust, Poyser
1999–2000	HBW (Lynx Edicions), HarperCollins
2001	Collins, HBW (Lynx Edicions)
2002	Collins, New Holland, Sprayway
2003	Christopher Helm, Collins, Eric Hosking Charitable Trust, Sprayway
2004–06	Christopher Helm, Collins, Craghoppers, Eric Hosking Charitable Trust, Sprayway
2007–08	Christopher Helm, Collins, Eric Hosking Charitable Trust, Sprayway, Zeiss
2009–10	Christopher Helm, Collins, Eric Hosking Charitable Trust, Warehouse Express
2011	Anglian Water, Christopher Helm, Collins, Eric Hosking Charitable Trust
2012–15	Anglian Water, Christopher Helm/Bloomsbury, Collins, Eric Hosking Charitable Trust, Simon King Wildlife
2016	Christopher Helm/Bloomsbury, Collins, Eric Hosking Charitable Trust, Simon King Wildlife

For the first award, presented in 1977, the judges were M. D. (Derrick) England, Eric Hosking, James Ferguson-Lees and Tim Sharrock. Eric Hosking was a long-time Photographic Consultant to *BB*, succeeded by Derrick England in 1976; the remaining two judges were then editors of *BB*. A similar composition of the judging panel has continued over the years, with Mike Richards joining for the 1978 award, Richard Chandler and Don Smith joining for the 1981 award. Since 2000, the judging panel has been more or less stable, and the majority of the current judges have been involved for at least 15 years (table 2).

Sponsors and awards

British Birds is extremely grateful for the financial assistance and the moral support that the competition has received over the years. In the early years, up to and including 1979, the awards and the cost of a prize-winners' reception were provided by *BB*. From 1980, the prizes were provided by a number of different sponsors (table 3).

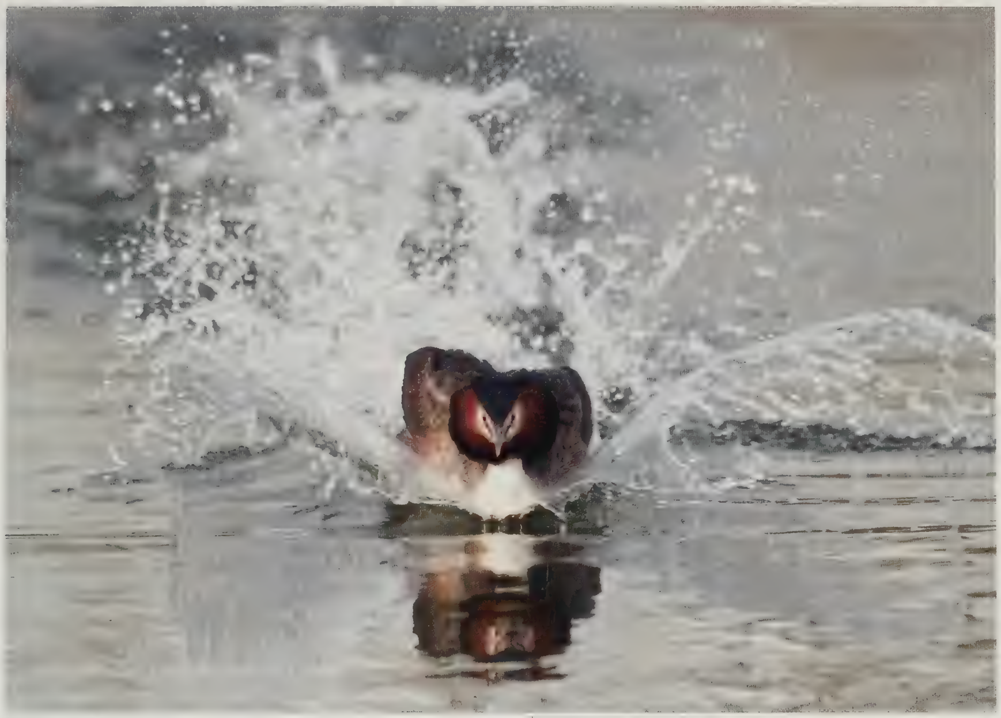
Initially, the BPY prizes were awarded in London, from 1981 at the Scotch Whisky Association (when the competition was sponsored by The Famous Grouse – which, like *BB*, has a grouse logo). Subsequently, the ceremony was held at the Mall Galleries during the course of the Society of Wildlife Artists' annual exhibition, a tradition that continued until 1999. Since then, the BPY presentations have been made at the British Birdwatching Fair at Rutland Water, with the winning images being displayed at the *BB* stand and the presentations being made together with the presentation of the Carl Zeiss Award.

Over the course of the last 40 years, the *British Birds* BPY competition has not just recorded changes in photographic technology and techniques and the associated evolution of bird photographers' skills. Insights into bird behaviour have also been gained from the photos, and the photos themselves are evidence of the continuing beauty and value of birds, not least as a subject for the science and art of photography.

Acknowledgments

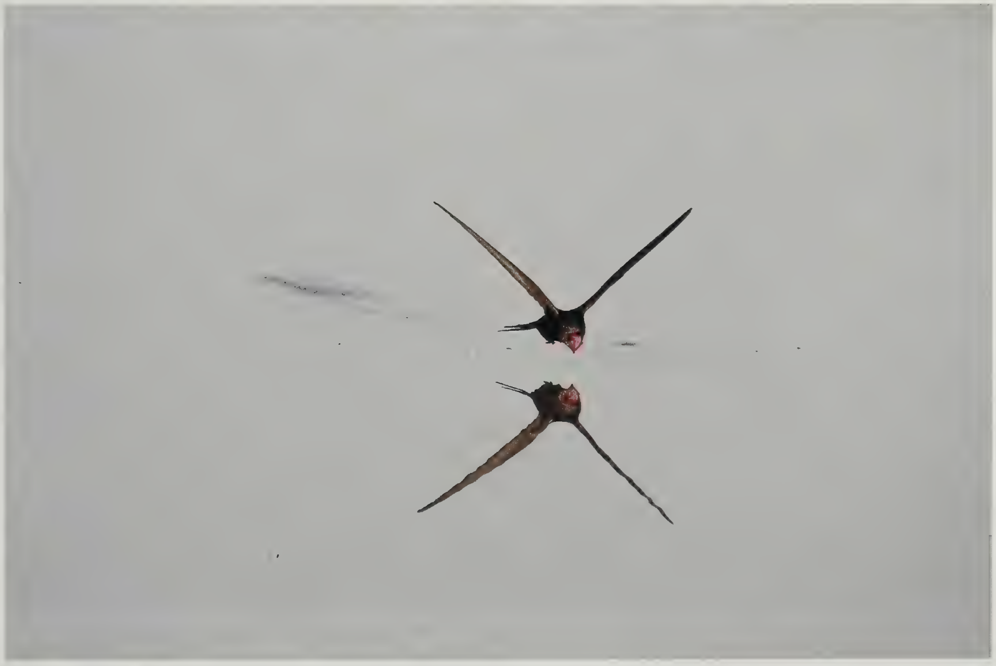
John Tinning kindly helped with some background information.

Richard Chandler, David Tipling and Richard Aspinall, c/o 4 Kings Road, Oundle,
Peterborough PE8 4AX; e-mail r_chandler@tiscali.co.uk



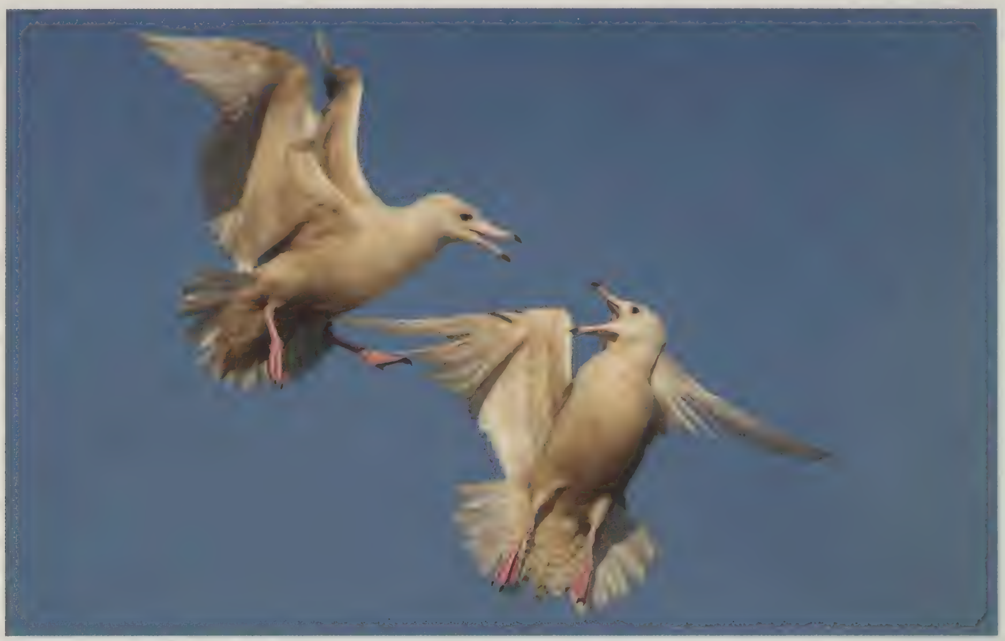
Chris Knights

280. 2006 The first digital winner was Chris Knights with his dramatic study of a Great Crested Grebe *Podiceps cristatus* responding aggressively to a rival. This was a third triumph in this award for Chris, whose first win came in 1985, with another image of a Great Crested Grebe.
Technical details: Canon EOS 1D Mk II, Canon 500 mm with 1.4x converter, 1/500, f7.1, ISO 400.



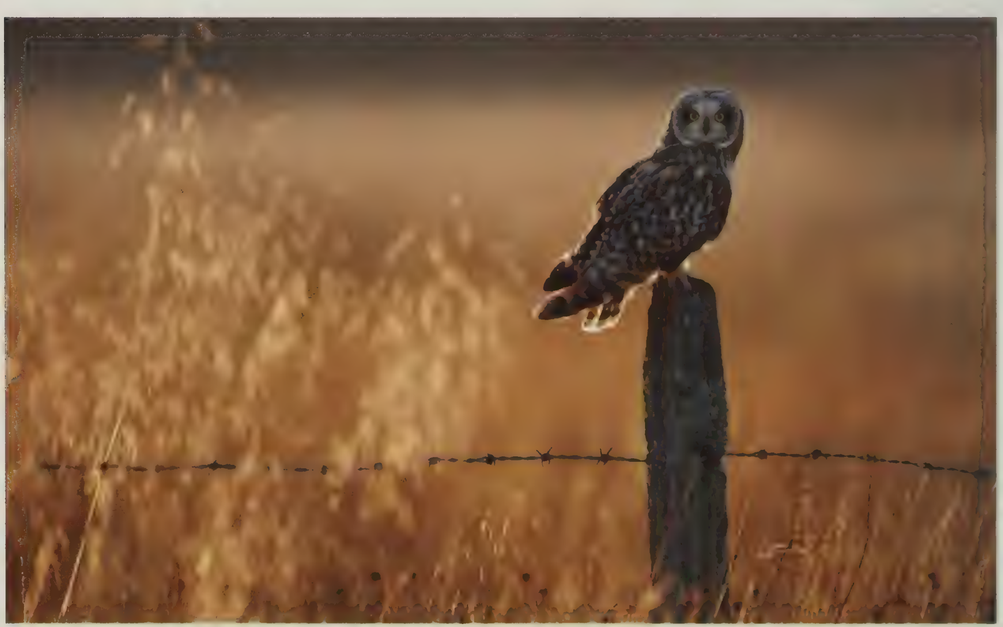
Roger Tidman

281. 2007 Continuing the theme of multiple winners, the fourth of Roger Tidman's successes was this stunning image of a Common Swift *Apus apus* drinking from the surface of a mirror-like pool, photographed in May 2006 in Spain.
Technical details: Canon EOS 1D Mk II, Canon 500 mm, 1/1600, f5.6, ISO 200.



Kit Day

282. 2009 Kit Day's image of two squabbling Glaucous Gulls *Larus hyperboreus* in Dingle Harbour, Co. Cork, in February 2008, was not only a clear winner that year, but another fine example of how birds in flight have been a much more prevalent subject since the digital format replaced film. This particular winner also shows that winning the competition is not dependent on having a large and very expensive lens – the Canon 400 mm 5.6 is a relatively low-cost yet still high-quality and portable lens, the sort that many birders now routinely carry in the field.
Technical details: Canon 1D Mk III, Canon 400 mm f5.6 with 1.4x converter, 1/2000, f8, ISO 250.



Mark Hamblin

283. 2010 Mark Hamblin's winning image of a Short-eared Owl *Asio flammeus*, photographed in Strathspey, Highland, in October 2009, came a decade after his father Tony won this award, in 1999 with an image of two Little Owls *Athene noctua*. Mark has made regular appearances in the final shortlist for a number of years (and was third in the latest competition – see p. 438), often with magnificent photos of birds in the landscape, just like this one.
Technical details: Canon EOS 1D Mk III, Canon 500 mm f4, 1/1000, f4, ISO 400.

Letters

Kites and other raptors following the hay harvest

With regard to the recent notes on this subject in *BB* (*Brit. Birds* 109: 300–302), the behaviour of raptors (Red Kites *Milvus milvus*, Black Kites *M. migrans*, Common Buzzards *Buteo buteo*, Marsh Harriers *Circus aeruginosus*, Common Kestrels *Falco tinnunculus*) as well as gulls and corvids following the hay harvest is widespread in the rolling hilly country that makes up most of central Germany, where the centre of the Red Kite population in Europe can be found. The highest numbers occur just as the hay is being cut. Red Kites will visit newly mown hayfields for up to three days and return when the hay is turned for drying.

I have been monitoring this behaviour in Red Kites in the border area between the Lösborde in southern Lower Saxony and the Leine-Weser uplands for some 40 years. During all these years, haymaking has provided the best opportunity for photographing kites. The birds ignore the tractors and photographers in cars while concentrating on catching rodents and other animals exposed by the harvesting.

Birds arrive from territories that can be up to 20 km from a hay meadow. In this area, populations of small rodents (most importantly those of Common Vole *Microtus arvalis*) were very low during 2008–13 before recovery in 2014–15. That recovery, combined with an increase in grass crops grown for bioenergy fuels, resulted in raptor concentrations that were unprecedented in recent times. The highest numbers in my area were recorded at a site west of Hildesheim between 25th April and 1st July 2014 with a peak on 9th May. A minimum of 36 Red Kites, 10 Black Kites and over 30 Common Buzzards as well as Common Ravens *Corvus corax*, Carrion Crows *C. corone* and Common Kestrels were registered. These were counts of the maximum numbers present at a particular time and took no account of turnover. The area of harvested grass was c. 88 ha, of the type used for anaerobic digestion bioenergy production. There are some 7,000 plants capable of processing such grasses or other green crops in Germany. The grass was 'shaved' to a height of 5–6 mm above the ground so that almost all the animals in the meadow would have been killed during harvesting.

Related to the rodent populations, the meadow in question also played host to numerous Great White Egrets *Ardea alba* and Grey Herons *A. cinerea* during the winter of 2014/15, with a peak count of 73 egrets and 10 herons on 23rd November 2014. During the whole period, raptor numbers were significantly higher than in surrounding areas.

A number of research teams in Germany are studying the requirements of the Red Kite with the aim of making recommendations for compensation programmes in situations where permits have been granted for new windfarm projects. The first proposals were to create meadows to provide a food supply for Red Kites. These were to be mown under controlled conditions so that rodents would not all be available at the same time. The supply of rodents was to be managed to ensure that the food supply could be maintained throughout the breeding period, and a 3–4 day rotation of the mowing regime was proposed. This has now been shown to be either ineffective or too expensive, considering the availability and high cost of arable land, and researchers are now looking into alternative approaches.

Alistair Hill, Ornithologischer Verein zu Hildesheim, Louise-Wippern-Ring 31, 31137 Hildesheim, Germany; e-mail ahill@ovh-online.de

Corrections

On p. 263 of the May issue, in table 3 of the paper concerning the nests of Common Buzzards *Buteo buteo*, the seventh entry should have read 'Bank/Short-tailed Vole *Clethrionomys glareolus/Microtus agrestis*' and not Bank/Common Vole. On p. 350 of the June issue, in the photo caption, the county should read Devon not Dorset.

Notes

Common Terns killing a long-staying predator

Rockabill is a small (0.9 ha) granite island in the Irish Sea approximately 6 km off the north coast of Co. Dublin. It supports one of the largest mixed tern colonies in Britain & Ireland including the largest Roseate Tern *Sterna dougallii* colony in Europe (in 2015, 1,388 pairs of Roseates, 1,945 pairs of Common Terns *S. hirundo* and 65 pairs of Arctic Terns *S. paradisaea* nested).

On 17th July 2015, a juvenile Common Kestrel *Falco tinnunculus* landed on Rockabill. It stayed for several days, depredating the numerous and 'freely available' Common Tern chicks. The Kestrel would pluck its prey where it was caught, with hundreds of adult Common Terns calling and swooping directly overhead. Despite this, there was no obvious indication that any terns made physical contact with the Kestrel, presumably balancing the risk of losing chicks with the risk of being depredated themselves. The Kestrel was never seen to move from its plucking site unless disturbed by one of the wardens, at which point it would fly to another part of the island or to the far side of the small neighbouring island. This pattern of predation, disturbance by the wardens, and sheltering/hiding on the neighbouring island continued for four days.

On the evening of 21st July, the Kestrel had caught another chick and was being mobbed by hundreds of adult Common Terns, which attracted the attention of one of the wardens. On being disturbed, the Kestrel flew out to sea and was followed by the terns. A short distance (<50 m) from the island the Kestrel was struck in the air by a Common Tern and fell into the sea. Blood was visible and suggested that it had been struck on the head/face. Both Common and Roseate Terns continued to mob the Kestrel as it struggled on the surface of the sea. Several hundred terns were now flying above it and taking it in turns to swoop at the struggling Kestrel; its feathers became more and more waterlogged over the course of at least 25 minutes before it eventually succumbed and died on the water.

Similar behaviour was seen later in the season when an adult Kittiwake *Rissa tridactyla* was seen struggling on the water surface and being mobbed by around 100 terns; it too eventually died, having become too waterlogged to fly. It is not known whether an attack by a tern originally caused it to get into difficulty, but Kittiwakes also breed on Rockabill and the two species generally coexist without any problem.

Burton & Thurston (1959) noted Arctic Terns attacking Kittiwakes, with individuals forced down into the water by terns on two occasions, despite the two species generally coexisting peacefully. Studies investigating Common Tern responses to overflying Herring *Larus argentatus* and Great Black-backed Gulls *L. marinus* found that the terns selectively responded to those that exhibited behaviours associated with predation (Cavanagh & Griffin 1993; Whittam & Leonard 2000). Earlier in the 2015 season, Kittiwakes landed in the Rockabill colony to gather nest material, which prompted no reaction from the terns, although few were on eggs at the time. Similar behaviour later in the season may be seen as more threatening. At the mainland Little Tern *Sternula albifrons* colony at Kilcoole, 55 km to the south, terns react very aggressively towards any Kittiwakes flying near the colony although they ignore large gulls, which are far more likely to take eggs, chicks or fledglings.

On Rockabill, adult terns (both Roseate and Common) regularly mob recently fledged young terns that land on the sea near the colony and which struggle to get airborne again; those that do not manage to swim to shore usually die. The reasons why the adult birds react in this way are not clear. There are several studies examining tern aggression during the breeding season and how this varies by nesting stage, distance and predator type (e.g. Clode *et al.* 2000, Meehan & Nisbet 2002, Palestis 2005). There is less information available on the impact this aggression has on the perceived predator and there are few published reports in which the predator has been killed. Incidents in which the predator was drowned are even rarer. A somewhat similar incident was reported from Orkney where a Short-eared Owl *Asio flammeus* was mobbed by Common Gulls *L. canus*, knocked into the water and eventually drowned having become waterlogged (Lyndon & Wilkinson 2002), though notably the attackers did not continue after the owl landed in the water. Kirkman (1908) cited Saunders (1889) on a similar incident in which Arctic Terns mobbed and drowned a Hooded Crow *Corvus cornix*. Such events are undoubtedly under-recorded but seem likely to be very rare.

Acknowledgments

The conservation of Roseate Terns on Rockabill has been a joint project between BirdWatch Ireland and National Parks & Wildlife Service (of the Department Arts, Heritage & Gaeltacht) since 1989. We also thank the Commission of Irish Lights for permission to stay and work on the island.

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Brian Burke, Andrew Power and Stephen Newton, BirdWatch Ireland Seabird Team, Unit 20, Block D, Bullford Business Campus, Kilcoole, Co. Wicklow, Ireland; e-mail brianjburke88@gmail.com

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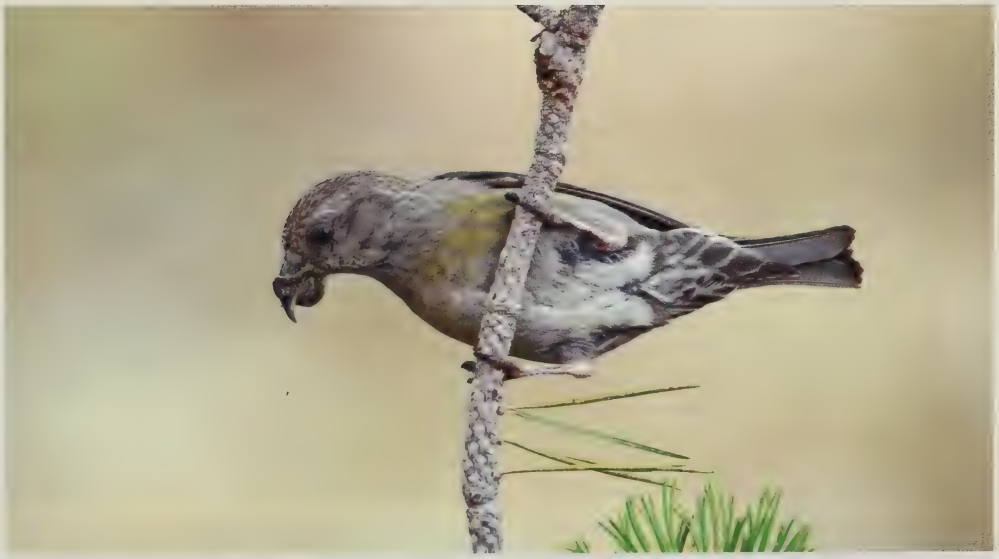
Common Crossbills with resin deposits on the bill

Plate 284 shows a female Common Crossbill *Loxia curvirostra* that I photographed in July 2015 in the Spanish Pyrenees. My companion, David Tipling, and I noticed that quite a few of the Crossbills visiting a drinking pool appeared to have similarly 'deformed' bills but when we looked closely at our images, we concluded that it was a build-up of resin on the bill, probably as a result of feeding on unripe pine cones.

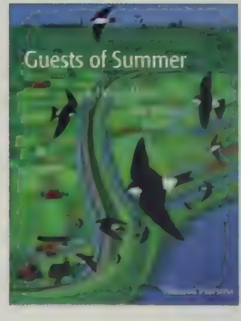
David Kjaer, Wiltshire www.davidkjaer.com


David Kjaer

284. Common Crossbill *Loxia curvirostra* with a build-up of resin on its bill, Spain, July 2015.

Reviews

Guests of Summer: A House Martin Love Story



By Theunis Piersma
BTO, 2016
Pbk, 115pp
ISBN 978-90-858157-0-9, £12.30, *BB* Bookshop price £9.99

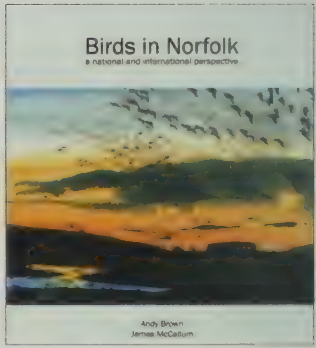
In this enjoyable book, Theunis Piersma takes time off from his well-known shorebird studies to enthuse about his other passion, the House Martin *Delichon urbicum*, which nests on his house in a small Frisian village. An eclectic mix of history, biology and conservation concerns, the book comprises 29 brief chapters, each of which is a personal account of a particular observation or question about the lives of these birds and their relationships and interactions with people, with an occasional digression on other hirundines and swifts.

This is not an in-depth study of House Martins but rather a book to dip into for fascinating insights into, for example, why these birds line their nests with white feathers, why they have feathered legs, how the chicks survive during prolonged bad weather, whether the adults roost in flight and where they spend the winter. There are interesting chapters on their nest sanitation and louse fly parasites, and their diet and flight – Piersma likens House Martins to 'little killer whales' whose black-and-white coloration may make both the whales and the martins difficult for prey to see.

The book includes a foreword by Ian Newton and, although not otherwise illustrated, chapter vignettes by Jos Zwarts. It was originally published in Frisian in 2014 but has been translated and updated for a wider, especially British, audience. In one chapter, for instance, Piersma discusses the close cultural connections between the English and Frisians in the Middle Ages, with similar names for swallows and martins, and in another the decline in House Martin populations in England, including around Selborne where they were so abundant in Gilbert White's day. The reasons for the decline are not clear but Piersma points in particular to modern farming practices and the resulting loss of insect life in both the UK and the Netherlands. This is a timely book, coming in the middle of the BTO's own two-year survey of the House Martin's population size, ecology and nesting preferences. It is very readable and will delight anyone who has admired this engaging summer guest.

Angela Turner

Birds in Norfolk: a national and international perspective



By Andy Brown and James McCallum
Langford Press, 2016
Hbk, 277pp; many colour paintings
ISBN 978-1-904078-31-9, £50.00, *BB* Bookshop price £47.99

The fact that Norfolk is one of Britain's finest counties for birds is hardly a secret but this book sets out to demonstrate precisely why this is the case. The bare statistics are compelling. The Wash is the most important site for waterbirds in the UK, supporting an astonishing 373,000 birds, while the north Norfolk coast is the country's fifth most important, followed by the Breydon/Berney area in 10th position and the Ouse Washes in 11th. And that's just the wintering wetland species. If you add in the breeding terns and waders, the birds of the heaths and Breckland areas, the reedbed breeders, the winter specialities such as Shore Larks *Eremophila alpestris* and Snow *Plectrophenax nivalis* and Lapland Buntings *Calcarius lapponicus*, the sometimes large movements and 'falls' of common migrants and the long history of scarce and rare (sometimes very rare) birds, then the sheer quality and diversity of

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the county's avifauna starts to become apparent.

All these riches are fully documented in this book with each important habitat or group of species meriting a chapter. Given Andy Brown's encyclopedic knowledge of the status and distribution of Britain's birds (amply showcased in the Poyser volume *Birds in England*), the treatments are thorough and their subjects carefully placed in their national and international contexts. There are plenty of facts and figures, many contained in well-presented charts, tables and figures, while additional text boxes provide extra information, for example on survey methodologies, the occurrence of particular species or historical dimensions.

In this last context I was particularly pleased to see a full recognition of Norfolk's long and distinguished ornithological history, with much use made of the early literature, from Gurney and Browne through Stevenson and Riviere to today's avifaunas. It was fascinating to read once more of the nineteenth-century irruptions of Pallas's Sandgrouse *Syrrhaptes paradoxus*, the 1968 Nutcracker *Nucifraga caryocatactes* invasion and the once-routine, day-long processions of Hooded Crows *Corvus cornix*. One wonders what the old naturalists would have made of today's Eurasian Spoonbills *Platalea leucorodia*, Little Egrets *Egretta garzetta* and Mediterranean Gulls *Larus melanocephalus*.

Following chapters on Norfolk's Special Protection Areas and the often forgotten land between the protected sites, the final chapter addresses the county's changing avian landscape, particularly in Breckland and the Fens, documenting their (invariably negative) historical transformations but also pointing the way towards exciting new habitat creation and restoration initiatives.

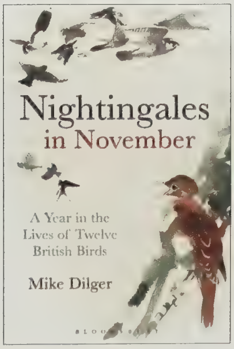
The textual description of the county's riches is, however, only half the story, for this book is as much an art book as an avifauna. Its visual content is contributed by James McCallum and we are treated here to a *tour de force* of his trademark economy of line and subtlety of wash. The large format gives plenty of room for the paintings and many are reproduced at full-page size. There are of course plenty of Brent *Branta bernicla* and Pink-footed Geese *Anser brachyrhynchus* 'birdscapes', but also more intimate renderings of breeding terns and waders and migrant passerines. Among the latter, I particularly enjoyed the flock of Ring Ouzels *Turdus torquatus* and the Richard's Pipits *Anthus richardi*, but all the paintings carry the hallmark of authentic close observation, transporting anyone familiar with the county's birds back to their own personal store of treasured moments and memories.

This is an unusual hybrid of avifauna and art book but it works well, the text being engaging and authoritative and the artwork aesthetically pleasing and in many cases inspirational. It is a fitting celebration of what is still – perhaps – Britain's greatest bird county.

Andy Stoddart

Nightingales in November

By Mike Dilger
Bloomsbury, 2016
Hbk, 368pp; a few illustrations and maps
ISBN 978-1-4729-1535-1, £16.99, *BB* Bookshop price £15.99



This book's subtitle – *a year in the lives of twelve British birds* – explains what it is all about. What is reasonably described as an eclectic mix of species has been selected – Bewick's Swan *Cygnus columbianus*, Peregrine *Falco peregrinus*, Lapwing *Vanellus vanellus*, Puffin *Fratercula arctica*, Cuckoo *Cuculus canorus*, Tawny Owl *Strix aluco*, Kingfisher *Alcedo atthis*, Swallow *Hirundo rustica*, Robin *Erithacus rubecula*, Nightingale *Luscinia megarhynchos*, Waxwing *Bombycilla garrulus* and Blue Tit *Cyanistes caeruleus* – and their lives are examined in 12 chapters, beginning with January and ending with December.

I liked the idea, seeing the value to birding beginners, and even the more experienced among us, of a popular, readable overview. I came across a number of things that were new to me, and generally enjoyed much of this book, parts of which are very good indeed. I also struggled with some of it and think it has some unfortunate shortcomings.

The first of these is that since our knowledge of the 12 species is so very variable, there is inevitably a lot of imbalance in the accounts: it is not too difficult to talk about the Cuckoo's life history, or that of the Robin, but saying much about Puffins in winter, Waxwings in summer or, ironically, Nightingales in

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November is more tricky. Secondly, the decision to split each month into three parts – early, middle and late – was surely a mistake. It has clearly been a struggle to write enough on some species, so that parts of the text seem like padding, or are very repetitive. I even found some sections rather boring. This would have been a much better book if the chapters were not split, and indeed if, through tighter editing, it was about a third shorter.

Which brings me to the editing. Some readers will not be too keen on Mike's informal, almost conversational style, and no doubt some will not like some of the anthropomorphisms – these do not bother me unduly, but I am sad that some really awful howlers in sentence construction have not been spotted. It is not good enough, for example, to write: 'Despite being so brightly coloured, many novice birdwatchers often struggle to catch sight of a Kingfisher...'; or 'Having already departed our shores well in advance of the Nightingales, the BTO has discovered...'.

The statement in the Acknowledgments about a 'grammatically spot-on edit' hardly rings true. A good editor would also have questioned the curious description of the Peregrine as 'the self-styled fastest bird on earth'.

Mike Everett

Siberia's Sprite: a history of fascination and desire

By Andy Stoddart
Privately published, 2016
177pp; 13 illustrations
ISBN 978-1-5327-6903-0, *BB* Bookshop price £10.00

SIBERIA'S SPRITE

ANDY STODDART

Invited to Monk's House in June 1952 by Eric Ennion's son Hugh, I was straightaway propelled to a north-facing window on the ground floor. On its list of 'seen through here' species, eclipsing all other names, was Pallas's [Leaf] Warbler, commemorating Britain's second ever, on 13th and 14th October the previous year, 1951. Hence my first hope-cum-desire for what became the Holy Grail passerine to my generation of migration students.

Sixty-four years later almost to the day, my postie delivered a small book with a 'sprite' on the cover. Automatically, I counted the stripes, found seven and smiled. With only a few pages turned, I sensed that Andy Stoddart's evocation of the best gem in *Phylloscopus* – and its fans of several ornithological classes over nearly 250 years – was going to be a compelling read…

Drawn from its 169 references, the text of *Siberia's Sprite* is broadly researched and meets its aim of describing the human journey to and around *P. proregulus* through an engaging series of historical reviews. The first four detail its early discoveries during imperialist adventures in old Russia, unsplit India and still-dynastic China. The cast of hunt initiators and members remains utterly inspiring, being led off respectively by Catherine the Great and Peter Simon Pallas. Enter also other old heroes, their names still attached to Asian birds but usually in modern books lacking personality. Andy fills that gap admirably and also confirms that this elegant little bird was not just a speculative target but also and always a spellbinding being.

The next five chapters tell the tale of when 'Pallas's' reached Europe and particularly Britain. The human players are again woven into a veritable 'Who's who' of rarity discoverers. The photograph of Heinrich Gätke with Santa beard, fur coat and gleaming shotgun is the human showstopper but Ted Ramm's ace bitch 'Duchess' gets full credit for pointing Cley and Britain's first-ever *proregulus* 120 autumns ago.

In its last third, the book's contents change. First comes a perceptive review of the bird's depictions by artists ancient and modern. They begin with (probably) Elizabeth Gould's charming pair of 'Dalmatian Regulus' and end with Andy's clear favourite, Lars Jonsson's 'true "sprite" poised to fly off the page'. Second follows a dutiful summary of the various explanations of other authors for the still astonishing westward surge of *proregulus* in the last six decades. Sensibly, Andy sums up the questions rather than choosing one answer. Third and last trail in 11 tense pages on the bird's taxonomic flux. Clearly the debate on whether the 'sprite' is species, superspecies or even genus needed airing, but the clash of contentions – with not one mention of behavioural signals – made for me a vexing end to an otherwise sparkling story of avian and human energies. Even so, I recommend his paean to 'Pallas's' without reservation. All parents of Next Generation Birders should put it in their Christmas stocking.

Ian Wallace

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Recent reports

Compiled by Barry Nightingale and Harry Hussey

This summary of unchecked reports covers early June to early July 2016.

Headlines Some top-quality highlights included a drake American White-winged Scoter off North-east Scotland, a Short-toed Eagle in Yorkshire and an adult Great Knot in Norfolk, while other wader records to catch the eye included a Pacific Golden Plover in Norfolk, a Stilt Sandpiper in Perth & Kinross, a Spotted Sandpiper in Greater London and the reappearance of the long-staying Hudsonian Whimbrel in Cornwall. An unseasonal Pied Wheatear on the Isle of Wight was the best of a decent spread of scarce and rare passerines, given that a Seaside Sparrow *Ammodramus maritimus* aboard a cruise ship that docked in Southampton and North Shields is unlikely to trouble the keepers of the British List.

American Wigeon ***Anas americana*** Records from Highland, North-east Scotland and Suffolk. **Black Duck** ***Anas rubripes*** Strontian (Highland), long-stayer, 29th June. **Blue-winged Teal** ***Anas discors*** Lough Beg (Co. Derry), 3rd July. **King Eider** ***Somateria spectabilis*** Long-stayers in Highland, Lothian and North-east Scotland. **Surf Scoter** ***Melanitta perspicillata*** Records from Cleveland, Lothian and North-east Scotland. **White-winged Scoter** ***Melanitta d. deglandi*** Blackdog/Murcar (North-east Scotland), 25th June to 7th July.

Wilson's Storm-petrel ***Oceanites oceanicus*** From pelagics off Scilly, singles on 27th June, 3rd and 4th July. In Ireland, one on a pelagic from Baltimore (Co. Cork), 3rd July, another 200 km west of Slyne Head (Co. Galway), 8th July. **Dalmatian Pelican** ***Pelecanus crispus*** Long-stayer, Cornwall, to 7th July.

Little Bittern ***Ixobrychus minutus*** Old Moor (Yorkshire), long-stayer to 7th July; Ham Wall (Somerset), from about 11th May to 13th June, and again 4th–6th July. **Night Heron** ***Nycticorax nycticorax*** Ham Wall, 16th June. **Squacco Heron** ***Ardeola ralloides*** Eggington (Derbyshire), 8th June. **Cattle Egret** ***Bubulcus ibis*** Records from Cambridgeshire, Dorset, Isle of Wight, Kent, Sussex and Co. Wexford. **Great White Egret** ***Ardea alba*** Ham Wall, high count of 17 during June. **Purple Heron** ***Ardea purpurea*** Records from Anglesey, Ceredigion, Hertfordshire and Co. Wexford.

John Richardson

285. Adult Great Knot *Calidris tenuirostris*, Gore Point, Norfolk, June 2016.

Graham Catley

286. Caspian Terns *Hydroprogne caspia*, Gibraltar Point, Lincolnshire, June 2016.

Black Kite *Milvus migrans* Records from Cornwall, Essex, Kent (two) and Yorkshire. **Short-toed Eagle** *Circaetus gallicus* Wykeham (Yorkshire), 2nd July.

American Golden Plover *Pluvialis dominica* Tacumshin (Co. Wexford), long-stayer to 12th June; Beacon Ponds (Yorkshire), 22nd June. **Pacific Golden Plover** *Pluvialis fulva* Titchwell (Norfolk), 18th June. **Semipalmated Plover** *Charadrius semipalmatus* Tacumshin, long-stayer to 9th June. **Hudsonian Whimbrel** *Numenius hudsonicus* Perranuthnoe (Cornwall), long-stayer again 30th June to 4th July. **Great Knot** *Calidris tenuirostris* Titchwell, 15th June to 4th July, also visiting Scolt Head, 17th–26th June and Holme (all Norfolk), 24th June to 2nd July. **Broad-billed Sandpiper** *Calidris falcinellus* Gronant/Point of Ayr (Flintshire), between 11th and 25th June, same Kinmel Bay (Denbighshire), 13th–14th June; Newport Wetlands (Gwent), 18th–21st June. **Stilt Sandpiper** *Calidris himantopus* Carsebreck Loch (Perth & Kinross), 24th–25th June. **Spotted Sandpiper** *Actitis macularius* Brent Resr (Greater London), 11th June.

Gull-billed Tern *Gelochelidon nilotica* Kinneil Lagoon (Forth), long-stayer to 25th June, also at Musselburgh, 13th June; Tacumshin, 10th–15th June. **Caspian Tern** *Hydroprogne caspia* Skegness, 13th June, then two Gibraltar Point (both Lincolnshire), 14th–18th and 23rd June, one visiting Breydon Water (Norfolk), 19th–22nd and 24th–29th June. **White-winged Black Tern** *Chlidonias leucopterus* One at various sites in Cheshire & Wirral and Flintshire, probably same in Lancashire & N Merseyside; other records from North-east Scotland and Yorkshire. **Forster's Tern** *Sterna forsteri* Kinvarra (Co. Galway), 7th July. **Bonaparte's Gull** *Chroicocephalus philadelphia* Wansbeck Estuary (Northumberland), long-stayer to 7th July; Tacumshin, 19th June; Blackrock Castle (Co. Cork), 2nd July.

Great Spotted Cuckoo *Clamator glandarius* Portland (Dorset), long-stayer to 18th June. **Alpine Swift** *Apus melba* Fethaland (Shetland), 26th June. **European Bee-eater** *Merops apiaster* Records from Devon (three or four), Dorset (two), Kent, Norfolk (up to three), Pembrokeshire, Sussex, Isle of Wight and Yorkshire. **Red-footed Falcon** *Falco vespertinus* Spurn (Yorkshire), 13th June. **Woodchat Shrike** *Lanius senator* Records from Borders and Dorset.

Greenish Warbler *Phylloscopus trochiloides* Bardsey (Caernarfonshire), 16th June; Portland Bill (Dorset), 18th June. **Iberian Chiffchaff** *Phylloscopus ibericus* Tresco (Scilly), long-stayer to 26th June. **Savi's Warbler** *Locustella luscinioides* Blacktoft Sands (Yorkshire), long-stayer to 10th June; Burnham Overy, 22nd–23rd June; Strumpshaw Fen (both Norfolk), 29th June to 3rd July. **Blyth's Reed Warbler** *Acrocephalus dumetorum* North Foreland (Kent), 28th May; Rye Harbour (Sussex), 17th June. **Great Reed Warbler** *Acrocephalus arundinaceus* Paxton Pits (Cambridgeshire), long-stayer to 16th June.

Pied Wheatear *Oenanthe pleschanka* Freshwater (Isle of Wight), 14th June. **Citrine Wagtail** *Motacilla citreola* Orfordness (Suffolk), 3rd July. **Tawny Pipit** *Anthus campestris* South Uist (Outer Hebrides), 14th June. **Black-headed Bunting** *Emberiza melanocephala* Skye (Highland), 10th–12th June. **Rustic Bunting** *Emberiza rustica* Isle of May, 18th June.

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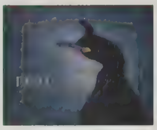

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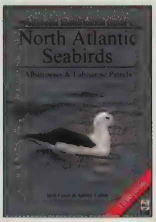

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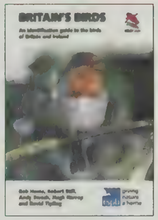

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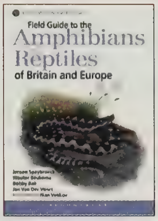

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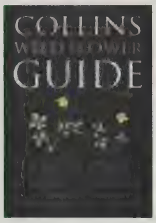

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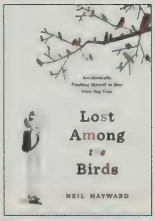

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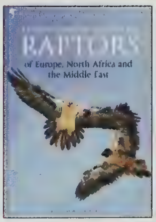

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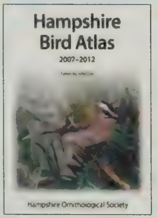

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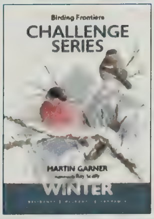

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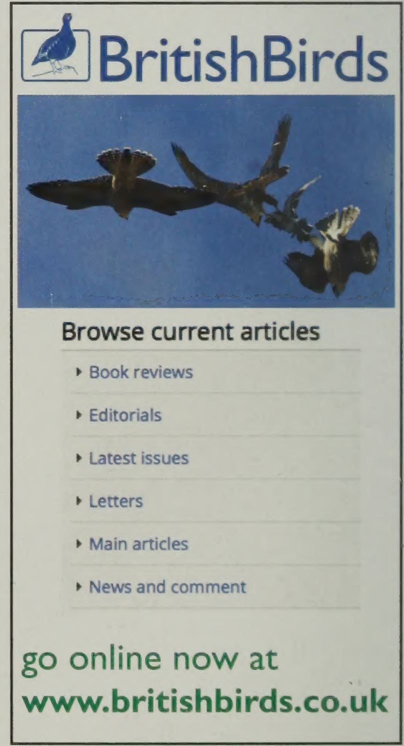

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